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HALVES,

And other Tales.

BY

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ETC. ETC.

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HALVES.

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HALVES.

CHAPTER I.

NEMESIS.

I ENTERED the Priory through the door that opened into the garden, and unobserved by any of its inmates. Indeed, of late months no notice was taken of any one's comings and goings below-stairs, of which at one time Mrs. Raeburn's lynx eyes had been so observant. All her watching, all her solicitude, were now monopolised by her two patients; and as to the attorney and John, they had never given themselves any trouble about domestic affairs. The servants' offices were shut off from the rest of the establishment, so that when I did

not happen to be at my desk, the whole ground-floor, save the office, was, as it were, in my sole occupation. What showed, among other things, the absence of supervision in the establishment was, that, though the dusk was now far advanced, the lamp in the hall was not lit. A light, however, streamed from the door of Brother Alec's sitting-room, which stood ajar, doubtless so that Mrs. Raeburn, who was sitting there, might hear the least summons from Gertrude's chamber. My darling was probably still asleep, and since Mr. Wilde had given directions that she should never be disturbed from slumber, this woman was waiting for her to awake that she might administer her food—with the seeds of death in it. How eery and terrible it all seemed! I almost wished that Mr. Wilde had adopted the alternative of which he had spoken, and sent the guardian of the law at once into that house of crime to purge it. But the wise doctor was, doubtless, right. As I stood in doubt whither to go, so that I

might, unperceived, witness Mrs. Hopkins's arrival, the far-off noise of wheels struck on my ear. That was then the fly which I had seen standing at the doctor's door as I came out, with the nurse's luggage in it. Someone else had heard it too, for the light above gave a broader gleam, and on the opposite wall was shown a woman's shadow. I drew aside into the library, whence, from the place where I had witnessed Mrs. Raeburn despoil the sofa of its contents, I could see through the hinges of the door into the hall. As the wheels came nearer I heard a footstep on the stairs, and presently Mrs. Raeburn came into view; she held a candle high in her hand, which showed her features very distinctly. They were harsh and hard as usual, but in her eyes there was an indefinable dread. Little could she guess what sort of guest, and with what tidings, was about to arrive; and yet it was plain she had her apprehensions. To the guilty, whatever is strange has danger

in it. When the carriage stopped without, she anticipated the summons of the bell by opening the door itself. "What is it?" I heard her say in her cold, sharp tones. The flyman's reply I did not catch, but only Mrs. Raeburn's answer.

"There must be some mistake, man."

"I am the nurse, madam," said a cheery, quiet voice, "sent by Dr. Wilde."

I expected an outburst, but Mrs. Raeburn said nothing. She simply withdrew into an angle of the wall close beside me, as though to shield her flickering candle from the wind, while the man brought in the luggage. The contrast between the looks of these two women was most striking. Nurse Hopkins, wholesome and apple-cheeked, seemed wholly occupied with checking off her little articles of property: box, bag, bundle, and umbrella; a pair of clogs, only one of which seemed to have arrived, gave her great disquietude. Mrs. Raeburn, on the other hand, never took

her eyes off this unexpected guest, whom, to judge by her expression, she would not, if she could, have at once annihilated, but would have put her to such slow and never-ending torments as theologians alone have imagined. A face like hers have I seen sculptured on a cathedral, as a gargoyle—malignant, impotent, damned. Impotent I said, yet something of power came into it when the driver, having been duly paid, turned, with a pull of the forelock to the lady of the house, to go.

“Stop!” said she. “Wait outside a minute; your fly may be wanted.”

The man withdrew, and she closed the door on him.

“What is the meaning of your coming here, woman?” inquired she then of the new arrival. “It is not right that Mr. Wilde should have sent you without previous notice.”

“He seemed afraid that he might be putting you out a bit,” was the other’s

quiet reply ; “but his letter, he said, would explain all. I was to give you this parcel with it.”

The object in question was carefully wrapped up in brown paper, and had no distinguishable shape, but as Mrs. Raeburn took it in her hand it emitted a metallic sound. I saw she recognised it for what it was at once. If that sound had been her passing-bell she could not have looked more near to death than at that moment.

“Wait here,” said she, in a low hoarse voice, “while I read the note.”

She pushed open the library door, which swung against me as she did so, put the parcel down on the table, and opened the letter. I could no longer see her as she read it, but I heard her foot beating impatiently on the floor like a dog’s tail.

Then there was a long silence, during which I only heard the pulsing of my own heart. I looked for some immediate catastrophe—that she should fall down dead on

the spot or turn upon the new arrival like a tigress; but presently her voice broke the silence, speaking with dry distinctness: "Mr. Wilde has explained matters, though I still think the intrusion unreasonable. He suggests that you should take your place at once in Miss Floyd's room; you may therefore as well do so."

What an effort it must have cost this woman to speak like that; there was not a tremor in her tone from first to last, but I noticed at the end that her hand fell heavily on the table, perhaps to support herself, yet quite as probably clenched in rage.

"Very good, ma'am," returned Nurse Hopkins from the hall; "would you be so kind as to show me the way?"

"True; I had forgotten that you did not know it."

She passed out close beside me as before. There was a change in her face now; always cold and chiselled, her features had become

fixed and rigid like those of a corpse. Her eyes, too, stared straight before her. It was a sight that I was doomed to see again, in illness and in dreams, for many a year.

The two women went upstairs together to Gertrude's room. To remain alone, awaiting I knew not what, except that it must needs have shame and terror in it, was no longer possible for me, and I betook myself to the office. John had gone away on business just before my uncle's arrival that morning, and though expected home to dinner, had not yet returned. The clerks had left, it being after five o'clock, and the attorney was at work alone.

"Here is Thomas Idle!" exclaimed the attorney, jocularly, as I made my appearance. The title had not been unearned, but, on the other hand, the master had never put work in the way of his apprentice. He had wanted the premium and the annual stipend paid for my maintenance, but not my services; and his only object had been

to make matters as pleasant to me as he could. He had had no sense of doing his duty by me. This struck me now, not for the first time, but with more conviction than heretofore. But our business connection was about to cease, as our friendly relations had long done ; and looking on the attorney's smiling face, and hearing his genial tones—which had some mellowness still in them—I had not the heart to judge him harshly. He had behaved ill to me with respect to Gertrude, but I utterly absolved him from having had part or lot in his wife's murderous design against her, nor any knowledge of so base a crime ; and now, since it must needs be that he should come to know it, I pitied him.

“You have seen Wilde, have you not, my lad?” he went on, in a more cheerful voice than he had spoken for many a day, the two hundred and fifty pounds he had received from Brother Alec that morning (for the latter made his quarterly pay-

ments, as John told me, to Mark himself—not to his wife) having, doubtless, acted as a tonic.

“Yes, sir ; I saw him when he had paid his visit.”

“And what report does he give of the patient?”

“Gertrude is no better.”

“That surprises me. Mrs. Raeburn thought there was a decided improvement ; so much so that it left her free to attend on Alec, else John could scarcely have been spared to-day. I heard wheels at the front-door just now, and thought he had come back. Who was it?”

“It was a nurse that Mr. Wilde has sent for Gertrude.”

“A nurse ? Well, that is the best news I have heard this long time.” He rose, went to the fire and rubbed his hands, as he was wont to do when pleased. “I have proposed it myself a dozen times, but my wife wouldn’t hear of it. She thinks she can do every-

thing herself, you know ; but, of course, the doctor's recommendation is final. Has Mrs. Raeburn seen her ? ”

“ She is with her now in Gertrude's room.”

“ Then there is nobody with Alec, eh ? Well, I must go up myself.”

It was idle to offer to be his deputy, I knew, and he went up.

I remained in the office alone, trying, very unsuccessfully, to fix my thoughts on my work, till after awhile John came in. He had been out Morecambe Bay way, drawing up an old man's will. He was cold, he said, and very sharp set. Why was not dinner served ? Where was the governor ? Having no appetite myself, I had not thought about dinner, but I now perceived that it was long past the hour for that meal.

“ Your father is waiting in your uncle's room until your mother relieves guard, I believe,” said I.

“ I'll go and fetch him down,” answered

he. "All's well, I hope, Sheddon?" He said this carelessly just as he was about to leave the room, yet waited at the door, it seemed to me with some anxiety, for my reply.

Had he any suspicion, I wondered, that things might not be well? Was it possible that this once light-hearted *farceur* was cognisant of his mother's infamous scheme? He had altered strangely of late; "sobered down," as the neighbours termed it. Was that because the weight of evil conscience was oppressing him, and had damped all merriment? No: to Gertrude he had always behaved with peculiar kindness, after his rough fashion; and if without much principle, was, I felt, incapable of a cruelty to anyone, far less to her.

"All is much as usual, John, except that Mr. Wilde has sent a nurse to attend on Gertrude."

"I am glad to hear it," said he. "She ought to have come long ago. It was

only my mother's cheeseparing that put it off."

This in his old vehement tone, which he was wont to use when speaking of that subject. That alone would have convinced me, had I needed conviction, of his ignorance of what was going on.

Presently he returned with his father, and we sat down to table. For a wonder, there were two dishes, though not very luxurious ones—hashed bullock's heart and boiled rabbit; the latter looking very skinny, cat-like, and indelicate, by reason of its insufficient covering of onions.

(Some people have a memory for the details of feasts, and I shall remember those two *plats* as long as I live.)

"Ugh!" said the attorney, turning the rabbit over with his fork. "I wonder which your mistress would prefer of these two dainties. Go up and ask her, Jane; she is with Miss Floyd."

I heard Jane's footsteps in the room

above ; then crossing the passage to Brother Alec's room ; then back again to that of Mrs. Raeburn.

I could not swallow a morsel : I seemed to be all ear—to have no other sense than that of hearing. Some catastrophe, I felt, was imminent. One thing only gave me comfort : the nurse, I knew, was with Gertrude.

“What can that girl be about ? This infernal stuff is getting cold !” exclaimed the attorney. “What's that ?”

It was a scream that reverberated through the house. All three of us rose to our feet. John and I were on the stairs in an instant, but he was ahead of me, and ran straight up to his uncle's sitting-room, the door of which stood open, doubtless left so by the maid. It did not seem to me that the scream had come from that direction, and I was right. It was now repeated from Mrs. Raeburn's own apartment.

“Heaven grant that the double doors

will keep it from Gertrude's ears," was my silent prayer, as I ran in. The servant-girl was kneeling on the floor, wringing her hands over the prostrate body of her mistress. She had had a hard life of it under her iron rule, but the present piteous spectacle had thrust every sentiment but compassion out of her simple nature.

"She is dying, Mr. Sheddon!" cried she passionately. "Run, run, for Mr. Wilde!"

One glance at the prostrate woman convinced me that no help for her lay in any skill of man. I had seen Death in the cottages of the poor at Stanbrook, and I recognised him here; yet I obeyed the girl's suggestion nevertheless. I was glad enough to escape from the scene on which John had already arrived, with scared remorseful face. Perhaps he remembered how he had spoken of his mother but a few minutes back, poor fellow. At the bottom of the stairs, with one trembling hand upon the banister, one trembling foot upon the lowest

step, stood the attorney ; his face was almost as livid and lifeless as that which I had just left on the floor of his own bed-room.

“What is the matter? Is it Alec?” inquired he, in a quavering voice.

“It is not your brother, Mr. Raeburn ; it is your wife that is taken ill,” said I.

Spurred by this new anxiety, he began to toil up the stairs, as I flung the garden-door open and rushed away upon my urgent yet fruitless errand. As I neared Mr. Wilde’s house, I saw the light in his parlour, that assured me of his presence, but my satisfaction was checked as soon as evoked, for at the same instant I remembered what he had enjoined on me : If Miss Floyd needed assistance, I was to fetch him, but if Mrs. Raeburn required medical aid—and how should he have guessed she would?—I was to call in other help than his. I hesitated, with my hand upon the bell ; but calling to mind how sagacious a man he was, and had proved himself to be in this very in-

stance, I resolved to obey his directions, and dashed away to Messrs. Bell and Doldrum's. The second member of the firm was at home, and to him, as well as my scarcity of breath permitted, I stated what had happened in a few words.

"I see, I see," said Dr. Doldrum, fingering his double eye-glasses; "it must be an urgent case."

"It is a matter of life and death, sir. For Heaven's sake, come at once."

"I should be very glad, my dear young sir, very glad, you know," was his hesitating reply. "But this is one of Mr. Wilde's patients. The etiquette of our profession forbids my attendance; unless, indeed, Mr. Wilde were out."

"I was especially directed to send for you, sir," insisted I. "Mrs. Raeburn has never been professionally attended by Mr. Wilde, though Miss Floyd has been so."

"That alters the matter. Yes, yes, I'll come." Dr. Doldrum was very stout, and

consumed a minute, even with my assistance, in the feat of getting into his great-coat. He had no more notion of hurry than a hippopotamus; he walked like a tortoise, and even at that moderate rate of movement panted like a grampus; yet with all that he was full of talk.

“Poor Mrs. Raeburn! Dead, you think? Well, that is a matter for scientific inquiry. Yet I should not be surprised. My diagnosis of the lady—all guess work, of course; but then experience makes one guess so much—is that the sword has worn out the scabbard—scabbard I mean. A very active and masterful woman. The heart has gone wrong; you may take my word for it. It is a mistake to suppose that fat people only are subject to such things; a great mistake. You are sure it was not a fainting-fit, by-the-by?”

“Quite certain,” said I. “I have seen people faint.”

“Just so; and, besides, she was not a

woman to faint—if my diagnosis is correct—at anything. This will make the third sick person in your house (even if it be no worse), will it not, young gentleman?”

“Yes,” said I. “Miss Floyd and Mr. Alexander Raeburn have been invalids this long time.”

“Aye, aye, and Mr. Wilde attends on both of them?”

“No, not on Mr. Raeburn. He has declined to do so, on the ground that he can be of no use.”

“You don’t say so? Bless my soul!” Dr. Doldrum stopped short—his breath had been quite taken away by this, which was a fact altogether out of his professional experience. “Yet the resources of science are boundless,” urged he.

“Let us get on.”

If we had “got on” at railway speed it would have made no difference to the cause of our despatch. In a few minutes after Dr. Doldrum went upstairs, he returned

again to the hall, where I awaited him; he was accompanied by John Raeburn, who looked very pale, but quite collected. "It is all over with my poor mother, Harry," said he, sadly, as I held out my hand to him in token of sympathy.

"Indeed, I feared as much, John."

"Yes, yes," sighed the doctor. "My diagnosis, though founded on slight opportunities of observation, Mr. Sheddon, has unhappily proved correct. It was the heart, as I foretold it would be. A common case, yet not less deplorable on that account. Mr. Raeburn is in a sad state up yonder."

"It is misfortune on misfortune, Dr. Dol-drum," observed John, thoughtfully. "This catastrophe is only the climax of my poor father's sufferings. My Uncle Alec and cousin Gertrude are both on the sick-list, and a shock like this——"

"Just so," interposed the doctor. "Perhaps, before I go, it would be as well if I

were to step up to Mr. Alexander and prescribe him something—I will not say consolatory, but that may tend to alleviate——”

“No, no,” John interrupted hastily; “he must not suspect—nor Gertrude either, for that matter—that this terrible event has happened; that is what I wished to have a few words with you about, doctor. A coroner’s inquest in this house would not only be painful—I don’t put it upon that ground at all—but perhaps fatal to one of those who are still left to us. You say very truly it is a common case. I hope, therefore, that no public inquiry will be necessary.”

“That is a question for the coroner, Mr. John; but I will write a line to him on the matter. Yes, yes; I’ll let you know at once. Perhaps I had better look in to-morrow, at all events, and see your father. We must take care of him all the more, you know, since you have now but one parent.”

“By all means,” answered John, in an absent tone. His mind seemed to be quite cured of its levity, and to be full of thought as well as sorrow.

CHAPTER II.

FLIGHT.

IT was somehow contrived that there should be no coroner's inquest, for the omission of which, indeed, there were many urgent reasons. Since Mr. Raeburn himself was an attorney, we may conclude that the law was not outraged in the matter; while it should be mentioned also that neither himself nor his son (unless the instance I have mentioned could be called evasion) showed the least disposition to evade inquiry. They only stipulated, in case any such were necessary, that it should be held elsewhere than at the Priory—which the condition of the two invalids obviously demanded.

Thanks to the judicious supervision of Nurse Hopkins, Gertrude was not made aware of the calamity that had befallen the household, and was reported by Mr. Wilde to be progressing favourably. Whether Brother Alec had been made acquainted with the matter or not, I was not informed; but the wail of his wakeful bird, with its "Dead, dead, dead! Only think of that!" discoursed nightly, through the partition-wall, of nothing else.

Mark Raeburn looked utterly broken by his bereavement; the far-back memory of the dead had, perhaps, something tender for him whereon to feed his thought; or, what is more likely, this strong prop being thus suddenly removed from his side, he was unable to bear up without it. He went about the house a piteous spectacle, or sat in his brother's room with John, or alone. Dr. Doldrum redeemed his promise and visited him repeatedly, but, notwithstanding that the resources of science were

so "boundless," benefited him nothing. If the doctor feared that Mr. Wilde would have taken umbrage at his professional attentions, he was mistaken. When I told him how the former had volunteered his services to the attorney, and that they had been accepted, he only replied, "Thank Heaven," and seemed well content.

On the day before the funeral, which was arranged for as early a date as possible, Mr. Wilde came down to speak to me as usual after he had seen Gertrude.

She was greatly better, and it was in contemplation that she should soon be removed to Stanbrook, where my aunt had made every preparation to receive her. These tidings lifted the weight of depression that had so long hung about my spirits, and made them so buoyant that I almost reproached myself for feeling such gladness in so sad a house. But in Mr. Wilde's face there was no reflection of my satisfaction.

"It is good news, indeed, so far as Miss Floyd is concerned," said he, in explanation of his gravity; "but there is more trouble in store, I fear, for this unhappy family."

"Surely no one suspects," said I.

"No, no," interrupted he; "the death of that wretched woman has absolved her from human laws; but something else is wrong under this roof. See here."

He produced from his pocket an official-looking letter. It was from Mr. Sinclair, the secretary of the Life Insurance Company, in London, and set forth that, although Mr. Alexander Raeburn's quarterly payment had been made the previous week, there had been an informality in it, which he (Mr. Wilde) was requested to set right. The medical certificate of the invalid's inability to repair to London in person ought to have been forwarded, as in the first instance, notwithstanding that Mr. Sinclair was himself acquainted with the facts of the case. Under the distressing

circumstance that had befallen the household, the secretary had written to Mr. Wilde direct, instead of advising Mr. Raeburn of the matter.

“Well, you had better see Mr. Alexander, and send the certificate, had you not?” said I. “There will be no difficulty in that, of course?”

“Perhaps not; but observe, Mr. Sinclair says, ‘as in the first instance.’ Now I have never sent any certificate to Mr. Sinclair at all. Consequently the one he did receive, if signed with my name, must have been a forgery.”

This idea was overwhelming; everything had been so mysterious in connection with Brother Alec’s illness of late months that nothing seemed incredible; at the same time, the matter seemed capable of explanation.

“The first certificate,” urged I, “may have been sent from the doctor at the sea-side, just before Mr. Alexander returned from it.”

“Then why should Mr. Sinclair write to me? I had no reason to suppose that he even knew of my existence.”

“Mr. Raeburn, or John, may have mentioned you as the medical attendant of the family.”

“It is just possible,” answered the doctor, thoughtfully.

“At all events,” said I, “nothing can be easier than to see one of them and get the matter explained at once.”

“Not to-day,” answered Mr. Wilde; “I will wait till after the funeral. In the meantime I will leave this note for Mr. Raeburn; you will make sure he gets it. He should have notice of the application at once, I think; and Mr. Sinclair must wait a post for my reply.”

So, therefore, it was arranged. I gave the letter to John that afternoon with my own hands, and he took it up to his father.

In the evening John came down to keep

me company for awhile. He looked ill and wretched, and said that he found his uncle's room intolerable to sit alone in.

"But your father is there, is he not?"

"No ; I forgot to tell you, he has asked Mrs. Hopkins's permission to see Gertrude, and he is now with her."

"I hope not to tell her about your poor mother?" cried I, whom this news alarmed on Gerty's account.

At present she believed that Mrs. Raeburn was suffering from severe indisposition, and expressed her hope that she should soon be permitted to tend her. She was quite unaware, also, of the Stanbrook project, which was not to be revealed to her till the next afternoon.

"No, no," said John, with the same absent and abstracted air that I had noticed in him for the last few days ; "he will be sure not to speak of that to Gertrude. He has other things to tell her."

I did not like that notion either, for

the "other things" would probably be business matters, to which she was surely in no condition to listen; yet I was obliged to be content.

The topic was not resumed, nor did John speak upon any other, except in monosyllables, throughout the evening. The elastic nature of the poor young fellow seemed unable to assert itself under its load, whether of present grief or coming trouble. I was of course present at the funeral, which took place on the ensuing forenoon at the Kirkdale cemetery, which stands without the town, and near the railway station. It was very fully attended, out of regard for Mark of course, rather than for his dead wife, who, in truth, did not leave a single friend behind her. My uncle was one of those present, and my aunt, he told me, had accompanied him to Kirkdale in a roomy carriage, in which it had been arranged by Mr. Wilde that Gertrude should be taken to the Rectory that very day. If it was

found necessary to tell her what had happened, she would more easily recover from the shock at Stanbrook, he thought, than at the Priory; but, as a matter of fact, they did not tell her till long afterwards. Aunt Eleanor had invented the fiction that Mrs. Raeburn's indisposition was infectious, though not dangerous, and thereby persuaded Gerty to leave the house without an attempt to see her hostess. Her removal had been effected before I returned to the Priory. Mr. Raeburn and his son had departed from the cemetery in their mourning-coach as they had come, alone, and had not yet come back when I arrived on foot by a shorter way. Anything more desolate and dismal than that death-stricken house it was impossible to picture; and when I saw Mr. Wilde come up the drive I ran out to meet him with a cry of joy. He told me that Gertrude had been got into the carriage without difficulty or objection. She was the meekest of patients, he said, and would, no doubt, prove the best of wives.

This allusion to my daily strengthening hopes was made, I have no doubt, to cheer me, and in mitigation of some other news of a different sort that he had brought with him.

“Mr. Raeburn and his son have gone off by train to London,” said he abruptly.

“Gone to London!” cried I. “Why they never hinted a word of such intention. I have been expecting them home every moment for this half-hour.”

“What I tell you is true, however,” answered Mr. Wilde; “and it is my impression you will never see either of them again.”

“Then poor Mr. Raeburn must have learnt the facts about his wife and Gertrude?” said I, calling to mind the attorney’s interview with the latter the previous night.

“No, Sheddon, I think not. If I know Mrs. Raeburn’s character, she was not one to make a confidant in anything, far less in a crime of her own compassing. She destroyed my letter, too, you may be sure, before she——died.”

The pause had such significance in it that it could not escape my attention.

“Good heavens!” cried I, “do you mean that she destroyed herself?”

“I do not know, Sheddon; I do not wish to know,” replied Mr. Wilde, gravely; “but such is my belief. When I sent Nurse Hopkins with that letter, indeed, I half suspected that the next thing I should hear of Mrs. Raeburn would be that she was dead; and hence it was that I warned you not to send for me in case she needed medical aid. If you had done so, I should have discovered the truth, and must have told it. Dr. Doldrum,” added my companion grimly, “has fortunately a great opinion of ‘the heart’ as a cause of mortality.”

“Then you really think that this wretched woman committed suicide?” said I, aghast.

“I do,” answered Mr. Wilde, decisively; “and I think I can guess the means employed. So sudden a death is suggestive of a particular poison, and of that I happen to

know (for I wrote out the authorisation for it to the chemist) she purchased some a few months back, to put an end to a savage dog, which she said was troubling the house."

"That was poor Mr. Alec's bull-dog, Fury," said I, "no doubt. It disappeared quite suddenly."

"Very likely. She did not, however, use it all, I think, for that purpose."

"But, suppose, getting impatient of her slower method," suggested I in horror, "she had given it to Gertrude!"

"She was too wise for that, Sheddon. She guessed that I had my suspicions about her, and that I should not have attributed a catastrophe such as hers, had it happened in Gertrude's case, to natural causes—— Well, you and I alone are the depositaries of that secret, and it must go no farther. There is another about to disclose itself within here, unless I am mistaken, which will have to be divulged to all the world."

We had been talking hitherto in the

carriage drive, but my companion now led the way into the house.

“I am come here, you know, to see Mr. Mark Raeburn about that certificate of his brother’s illness. Since he has gone away, I must needs apply to the patient himself. Will you come with me upstairs to Mr. Alexander?”

CHAPTER III.

RUIN.

AFTER the gloomy incident of the morning, and the terrible revelation I had just heard from my companion's lips, a mere visit to a sick man was not an ordeal from which I had any reason to shrink; and yet the thought of it oppressed me more than all the rest. I had not yet got over the shock of that silent interview with Brother Alec, the circumstances of which, contrasted with my uncle's experience of his condition, were so inexplicable to me; and his apartments, perhaps from my long and mysterious exclusion from them, had a sort of Bluebeard's chamber "attraction of repulsion" for me, which I was ashamed to confess even to my-

self. It was with a beating heart, therefore, that I followed Mr. Wilde upstairs, past the chamber from which, though she had left me so desolate, I felt thankful that my darling had been removed, and the door of which now stood open for the first time for months; past the room, too, from which its lifeless tenant had been borne that morning, and where my own eyes had made the search the result of which had caused her to perish miserably by her own hand.

At the door of Brother Alec's sitting-room Mr. Wilde made a moment's pause, then entered abruptly and without knocking, and I followed close upon his heels. It was, as I expected to find it, vacant; then he passed swiftly through into the other room, from which, as usual, the light was almost excluded by curtains and shutters. In the bed I could just discern the form of the sick man, with his face turned towards the darkened window. Mr. Wilde approached it, but it did not move.

“Mr. Raeburn, Mr. Raeburn!” cried I loudly, for the silence, as before, was getting intolerable to me. “Mr. Wilde has come to see you; will you not speak to him?”

There was a moment’s pause, and then the monotonous cry that I knew so well broke forth at my elbow: “Dead, dead, dead! Only think of that!”

“The parrot is right,” observed Mr. Wilde, calmly.

“Great Heaven!” cried I in horror, “you don’t mean to say that Mr. Alexander is lying there a corpse.”

“There is no Mr. Alexander here at all, Sheddon,” answered my companion, and at the same time he threw open the shutters and let a flood of light into the room. Then I saw that the thing I had taken for the invalid was but a bundle of clothes cunningly disposed so as to represent a human form. Everything in the apartment was in accordance with its character of sick room: the

phials on the mantelpiece, the watcher's chair by the bedside, spoke of ministrations and tendance; but of the man for whom these tokens of solicitude existed there was no trace.

• “What on earth has become of him? Dead or alive, where is he hidden?” asked I, in amazement.

“I cannot answer that question, Sheddon,” replied Mr. Wilde; “though that he is dead—and buried—I have no doubt. What you saw a week ago was this same Eidolon—this counterfeit presentment—which we see now, and in my opinion there has been nothing else here for months. Mr. Alexander Raeburn never returned from Sandi-beach.”

“But I have seen him, certainly once since then, for I conversed with him; and my uncle has had two interviews with him—one in Mr. Sinclair's presence, and the other alone, not a week ago!”

“You have all been deceived, Sheddon,

though by what means I cannot guess. Mr. Alexander was never here ; of that I am confident. The forged certificate ; the seclusion in which his family shrouded him ; and, above all, this pretence of his presence here, convince me of the fact. Some one has played his part on the few occasions when it was necessary, and played it successfully."

A sudden revelation, in the likeness of John Raeburn to his uncle, here broke in upon me.

"It must have been John Raeburn!" cried I. "I remember now that he was said to be away from home on both dates of my uncle's coming. It must have been he who lay in that bed and fooled us all."

"And to some purpose, too," observed Mr. Wilde, grimly, "since he thereby obtained two payments of an annuity for a man who was dead and buried. He must have forged the medical certificate, too, in the first instance, which brought the secre-

tary down from town, and if he had but known that a second was necessary, this game might have gone on for years. It is not an original idea, Sheddon. There was a bishop once, who, thanks to an intelligent housekeeper, received his episcopal revenues for several quarters after his demise; but it was a very clever contrivance, for all that."

The cynical tone of my companion jarred upon my feelings. The ingenuity of this nefarious scheme excited in me no admiration. I only thought of the shame of its discovery, which must not only overwhelm the perpetrators of the fraud, but affect others wholly innocent of it. I now perceived why my Uncle Hastings had been fixed upon to certify to the fact of Alexander Raeburn's existence; the guilelessness of his nature, and the carelessness with which all business matters, whether of his own or others, was transacted by him, had pointed him out as a fit instrument for the attorney's designs.

Moreover, he was a personal acquaintance of Mr. Sinclair's, which had, of course, assisted in putting that gentleman off his guard. I called to mind the agitation which Mark Raeburn had exhibited on the occasion of the secretary's coming, and his exhilaration of spirits when the ordeal above-stairs had been successfully concluded, and recognised their cause.

"Is there no possible way, think you, Mr. Wilde?" inquired I, "whereby this matter may be hushed up and restitution made?"

"It is quite out of the question," answered my companion; "for my part, I have done enough already to save the tenants of this house from public shame. It is impossible for us to explain Mr. Alexander Raeburn's absence; and it is necessary on all accounts that his death should be proved. Come—you had better come home with me for the present, since this house will be in the hands of the police before nightfall. I should not

be doing my duty if I did not communicate with them, and with the Assurance Society, at once."

I was about to turn away to accompany my companion from the room, when the voice of the parrot once more was heard in imploring tones: "Dead, dead! think of that! Poor Poll, poor Poll!"

Chico's once ample vocabulary had dwindled down to those few pitiful words. Their eloquence, however, was not lost upon me, and taking up his cage I carried the bird from the deserted room, determined that henceforth, for Brother Alec's sake, it should form a part of my own goods and chattels—a resolve on which I had, afterwards, good cause for self-congratulation. It was impossible for me to proceed at once to Stanbrook, since my presence would almost certainly be required in Kirkdale by the authorities, so I gladly accepted Mr. Wilde's offer of hospitality, and while staying under his roof I became acquainted,

through the investigations that followed, with various particulars respecting the attorney and his son, who both, to my great contentment, contrived to leave England before the law could be brought to bear upon them.

Mark Raeburn's love of speculation had ruined him long before I had made his acquaintance, and when his name and credit in the district still stood high. After losing his own money, he lost that of his wife, who had had a considerable dower of her own, besides that West India estate, her involuntary disconnection with which had made the Emancipation question such a tender topic with her. The knowledge that he had done her this wrong no doubt assisted to give her that supremacy over him which had ended in an unmitigated despotism. After these mischances, the attorney strove to right matters by speculating with the fortune of his cousin Gertrude, which he also lost.

I heard this part of his sad story from her own lips, as she had heard it from his, on that last interview he had with her before his flight. He made a clean breast of all his iniquities so far as she was concerned, and I need not say that she forgave him. Why he did so, I am not certain; but I think it was to exonerate his son from any share in them. Up to the time that that bubble of expectations from Brother Alec had burst, I believe John to have been wholly innocent of his father's schemes, as Mark in his turn was of his wife's attempted crime. In other respects the attorney and his wife worked together, I have little doubt, and had no secrets from one another. Having once stooped to defraud his cousin, he had no scruples as to his other clients, and almost all my uncle's little property had gone the way of Gertrude's. Mark had disposed of the securities, which were not, and never had been, in Kirkdale bank; and the duplicates I had found were merely imitations of them,

far too clumsy to have been concocted by the deft fingers of John Raeburn. Had he been entrusted with the task, my suspicions would probably never have been aroused, and indeed his innocence was established by the fact of his having procured me a sight of the papers in his father's absence. On the latter's return from the seaside, he had been compelled to make his son his confidant, and henceforth the partner in his frauds. It was John who had written in his uncle's name from Sandibeach, where the old man was dying, or perhaps already dead ; he had been buried there under the name of Prescott (as was afterwards discovered), and John, under pretence, as usual, of a business journey elsewhere, had gone thither, and been brought back from thence in his uncle's stead, to play the *rôle* of the sick man at the Priory.

He did so to perfection, including the forging of the receipts of his quarterly payments from the Assurance Office ; but I will do him the justice to assert that his dishonesty

went wholly against the grain with him. He was not, of course, a well-principled lad in any sense, but his nature was neither cruel nor unkind, and I believe revolted against the very scheme which his ingenuity for a time rendered so successful. If poverty be any excuse for crime, it was so in his case (not to mention that he was spurred on by his own parents to commit it), for it turned out that the Raeburns had had little else to maintain them, at the time of my coming to live with them, beyond my premium and the annual sum paid for my board and lodging; while, afterwards, they lived on the credit accorded to them by reason of their expectations from Brother Alec, which they were well aware would never be realised. It was, doubtless, in the embarrassment produced by this state of affairs in its earlier stage, and in the knowledge that his defalcations must needs be brought to light, in case Gertrude should become engaged out of the

family, that inspired the attorney with the idea of persuading me that her hand was already promised to John. Very likely the notion of having her for their daughter-in-law had at one time occurred to the old couple, but before my coming to the Priory I am sure that Mrs. Raeburn at least had given up the plan as impracticable. She read Gertrude's character too thoroughly to deceive herself in that respect. It was not till matters grew desperate, that this wretched woman conceived the crime which she had been within such a little of having accomplished; and I again assert my confident belief that neither her husband nor her son were privy to her design. There were degrees and grades of guilt in these three persons, each strongly marked. John's transgression, though he took such an active part in the plot, was in fact of a negative character; the attorney, by long misdoing, had become reckless and fraudulent to the core; while Mrs. Raeburn was ruthless from

the beginning, and stuck at nothing. Of her I shall presently have a word or two more to say in proof of that harsh judgment.

These facts or convictions did not present themselves to me at once, nor within a brief space ; it was weeks before my presence at Kirkdale could be dispensed with by the authorities, and my mind was compelled to concern itself with these sad matters, from the consideration of which it would gladly have escaped. Otherwise, I had sufficiently bitter food for reflection in the position of my own affairs. Not only was Gertrude's fortune lost, but my own little property, which had been confided by Mr. Hastings, along with his own, to the attorney's keeping, was also gone. Not only, therefore, had I no expectations for the future, but no means, however anxious I might be to make up for previous idleness by application to my legal studies, of continuing them. The question was no longer, When should we marry ? but, How

should we each subsist apart? From the ruins of her property, indeed, the attorney had pointed out how a small income might be derived for Gertrude's maintenance, but the sum was so slender as scarcely to afford her the necessaries of life. She wrote to me hopefully, but I had not the courage to reply to her in a similar strain. I was a beggar; and though the thought seemed to pull my heart up by the roots, I felt that it would be my duty to release her from an engagement which it might never be in my power to redeem.

If I had had anywhere else whither to betake myself, I should have avoided the temptation of going to the Rectory while Gertrude remained under its roof; but there was no alternative for me in the matter, and so soon as I was permitted to leave Kirkdale I bade good-bye to my kind host, and, sick at heart, departed for my old home.

CHAPTER IV.

A SURPRISE.

I HAD seen my uncle more than once since the breaking up of the Raeburn household, the business connected with the fraud on the Insurance Company having necessitated his presence, as it had my own, at Kirkdale ; but I had found him so distressed and annoyed by his involuntary connection with the attorney's misdeeds, and by the insult which had been put upon him in making him play the part of catspaw, that I had scarcely opened my lips to him upon my own affairs. Now, however, I determined to do this at once ; I desired that there

should not be an hour's unnecessary delay in understanding my position, and asking his advice as to my future. I wished my stay at Stanbrook to be as short as possible, in case any plan should be devised between us for my setting to work in earnest to gain my own livelihood, and I was resolved that, while I did remain there, there should be no misunderstanding of my position as respected Gertrude. Since matters were altogether hopeless, it would be cruel indeed in me, I argued, not to release her from her promise; if the hope to which I secretly clung was that she would cleave to me still, and prefer to wait long years for my unworthy self, even till youth had fled from her, I was ashamed of it, but I deceived myself all along.

Selfish as I was, Heaven knows I loved her better than myself; and if I lost her, I knew that life would for me have nothing worth striving for; fortune with-

out her, I should have despised; and fame—

If I e'er took delight in its praises,
'Twere not for the sake of its high-sounding phrases,
But to see the bright eyes of my dear one discover
She thought that I was not unworthy to love her.

I had never loved Gertrude so dearly as now, when hard necessity was about to part us for ever. In the interval of our separation she had almost entirely recovered her health, and when I arrived at the Rectory she was absent, having gone out with my aunt for a drive in the carriage. For this I was not sorry, as it enabled me to have at once that interview with my uncle which I so greatly desired.

The rector welcomed me very heartily, yet did not look less worried than on the last occasion when I had seen him.

“Here is a precious lot of rubbish,” cried he, pointing to a mass of documents with which the table was covered. “No

sooner have I escaped from one legal cobweb than I get caught in another. What wrong have I ever done to my fellow-creatures that any one of them should appoint me his trustee?"

"Indeed," said I, "uncle, I am very sorry to find you so bothered; and more particularly as I want to bother you myself. My aunt and Gertrude, I find, are out, and I wish to take the opportunity of their absence to have a talk with you upon my unfortunate affairs."

"Yes, I've made a pretty mess of them, Harry," observed my uncle, ruefully.

"I am sure you did it all for the best, sir," answered I, cheerfully.

"That is small comfort, my poor lad, when everything has happened for the worst," returned my uncle, gloomily. "See, this comes of trusting a lawyer. But whoever would have thought that Mark Raeburn was a swindler and a thief? To rob his own flesh and blood—an unprotected girl—and

his own ward ! Only think of that ! Gertrude has behaved like an angel about it, as one would have expected of her ; nor from your lips, my lad, have I heard one word of complaint—and you might with justice have complained.”

“My dear uncle,” returned I, deeply affected by the rector’s manner, which was most contrite and tender, “I hope I should never complain of you for any miscarriage of my affairs, even were you to blame. Nothing, however, could have been done, so far as I can see, to hinder this man from robbing us. The mischief was probably completed when I came upon those duplicates, so that, even if you had inquired at the Bank about the deeds—as Mr. Raeburn had the audacity to suggest—no real good would have come of it. We should only have discovered our losses earlier.”

“Still, in that case, we might have saved something out of the fire ; and it was my duty to have made the inquiry. I had,

however, some excuse for my negligence, Harry, as this document will show," and he placed his hand upon a parchment roll that lay on the table.

"My dear uncle," answered I warmly, "I do not wish you to excuse yourself. Whatever I have lost is far less than what I already owe to you ten times told. I am young and strong, and fit to make my own way in the world. It is not upon my own account that I feel this blow at all. It wrecks my happiness, because it has destroyed—I am afraid, utterly destroyed—the hopes I had entertained with respect to Gertrude. I want you to tell her from me—I thought that I could have told her myself, but I dare not—that all must needs be over between us; that though I love her so dearly——" I suppose I must have broken down here, since my uncle interposed with a "Don't fret, don't fret, lad. Sunshine will come out of this yet."

"No, no, uncle; it is idle to cling to such

a hope, and it would be doing wrong to Gerty."

"If Alec had only known the poor girl's fortune had gone," mused the rector, once more touching the papers before him, "he would not have made such a will as this. It is he who has put me into this new hobble, by appointing me his executor. He left Gerty nothing, as he told us, because he concluded that she was already provided for. Else she would have been an heiress still."

"I would she were," said I, presently; "though, had it happened so, she would still have been as far out of my reach as now."

"Why so?" inquired my uncle, sharply. His tone and the sudden colour on his cheek reminded me that he himself, as a poor man, had married a woman with money, though, I am sure, not from mercenary considerations. Indeed, as I have said at the commencement of my tale, my aunt had

thrown the handkerchief to him, and he could not help himself.

“Well,” stammered I, “having wooed Gertrude on something like equal terms, I should not like to have held her to her bargain when she was rich, and I had not a penny.”

“Ah, you think people of fortune should only wed people of fortune, do you?” observed the rector, drily; “that’s a pity, since otherwise you and Gertrude might have made a match of it yet.”

“How is that, sir?” inquired I, with eagerness. “Believe me, that if any good fortune has happened to—to Miss Floyd—I shall rejoice indeed.”

“I am sure you would, my lad; but there is no such luck. Here is a copy of Alec Raeburn’s will, with a number of dreadful documents in connection with it—the poor man had shares in everything, it seems—which I only received from town this morning. In default of relations, or rather

by reason of the exclusion of them for the reasons with which we are acquainted, he has left the residue of his fortune, after deducting the sum sunk in the annuity, to his London agent."

"A very mistaken measure, in my opinion, uncle, and one that shows more pique than good principle," exclaimed I hotly, thinking how many shifts and buffets from poverty's hard hand even a little of this money might have saved my darling.

"*De mortuis*, Harry," observed my uncle, gravely.

"Nay, sir, I speak no ill of him," returned I. "For my own part, I have none but kindly recollections of the poor old man; indeed, he left me a legacy as it is," and I pointed to Chico, who I had brought in with me in his cage, and who had been listening to our conversation with his head on one side and a preternaturally sagacious twinkle in his eye.

"He left you something more, Harry——"

Sit down now, and don't be excited while I read to you a little extract that concerns yourself. When I said that Alec Raeburn had bequeathed the residue of his fortune—twenty thousand pounds it is, not a penny less—to his London agent, I should have added that it was '*in trust* to Harry Sheddon.'"

"You are joking, sir," gasped I. "He cannot have left it to me?"

"'Pon my life he has though, if I can read English, Harry. These are his words: 'I do not leave this money to Gertrude Floyd,' says he, 'as it would behove me to do, since, in that case, my brother Mark may come to inherit it, which I do not desire; but to Harry Sheddon, on condition that he shall marry the said Gertrude Floyd.'"

I felt thunderstruck, and for a moment or two could find no voice to speak.

"Cheer up! cheer up, you lubber!" cried the parrot, suddenly. "D—— your eyes, cheer up!"

Removed from the depressing atmosphere of Brother Alec's room, Chico had recovered his marine vocabulary.

The rector leant back in his chair and roared with laughter. "If you should not be rich enough to afford to keep that bird, my lad, I will keep it for you. You may still be a poor man if you please. The terms of the will require that you should marry Gertrude, and if your late objections to inequality of fortune are absolutely insurmountable——."

"Nay, sir, since I am only to take the fortune, conditionally upon my sharing it with Gertrude, it is, in fact, divided between us," urged I, laughingly.

"I thought you would contrive to reconcile yourself to a little sacrifice of principle," said my uncle drily, who had evidently not quite forgiven me for my independent spirit. "I could have told you of this good luck weeks ago, Harry, but I could not resist putting you to the test of adversity,

which, I must say, you have stood in a way that does you honour. This will was made when I went up with poor Alec to town, and, until his death, I promised to keep its provisions secret. It was the knowledge of them, however, which made me more delicate than I otherwise might have been with respect to Mark Raeburn. Since his brother had left so much money away from his family to my nephew, I did not like to show a want of confidence in the attorney's management of my own affairs. That was the excuse I spoke of, for my not inquiring about those documents at the Bank."

"You will at least permit me then," urged I, "to refund to you what you have lost, uncle, through delicacy upon my account——"

"Chut, chut," interrupted the rector; "what is gone was yours, lad, for it was all intended for you, which comes to the same thing. There is no refunding, nor business

of any kind, thank goodness, to be transacted further. The London agent and I are your trustees, and all we have to do is to see that the conditions of the will are carried into effect, and that as soon as possible. Yes, sir," continued my uncle, assuming an air of severity, "you will have to marry this young woman before the year's out."

CHAPTER V.

THE LAST MYSTERY EXPLAINED.

My uncle had not been so reticent to Gertrude as he had been to me. He had not had the heart to conceal from her the good fortune that was in store for me, and, therefore, for herself. In her delicate state of health, and in the distress of mind from which she was suffering from the disgrace of her kinsfolk, it would indeed have been a cruelty to withhold any materials for comfort, and they had been to her bodily health as a tonic, and to her wounded spirit as a balm.

I never saw her looking better or more beautiful, though I had seen her look more

bright, than when I clasped her in my arms that afternoon at Stanbrook; and even the brightness came back to her in time. After all, no one else had suffered from the depravity of the attorney except ourselves, whose interests had lain so helplessly at his mercy, and the Assurance Company, whose two quarterly payments, extorted by his fraud, it was my first care to make good out of Brother Alec's legacy. None of our neighbours had lost a penny by the Raeburns, and everyone was full of respectful sympathy upon Gertrude's account. Not a word of bitterness ever escaped her lips in connection with the loss of her fortune. "Think as charitably as you can of us, Gerty," had been the attorney's last words to her after he had confessed the wrong he had done her; and she did not neglect his injunctions. As for Mrs. Raeburn—of whose iniquity she never knew for years, and whose disagreeable characteristics were forgiven if not forgotten, when she learnt that the grave

had closed over her—she would sometimes speak of her with a tenderness that aroused my secret indignation. When the sale, necessitated by the attorney's debts, took place at the Priory, she even expressed a wish to obtain some memento of her late hostess, and I had, therefore, purchased for her the *escritoire* at which that lady had been wont to sit when supervising her weekly accounts.

I did not conceive that the terms of Alec Raeburn's will, though they ran "within the year," by any means precluded my marriage with Gertrude within the month; and I should have liked it to take place with even more than that despatch if the matter had rested with myself alone; but my darling's sorrow for the misfortunes and, alas! the crimes, of her cousins was not only severe but lasting, while the shock of Mrs. Raeburn's sudden demise affected her so seriously, that I made up my mind that she should never know how it had really

happened. Thus the summer had reached its fulness ere my happiness was permitted to culminate in our union, which, it was arranged, should not separate us from the old home. My aunt's affection for Gertrude had grown to be very great—much greater, indeed, I must confess, than it had ever been for me. Gerty would carry Nelly in her arms—while, thanks to my clumsiness, I had never been permitted so responsible a charge—and did, out of love, a thousand little things to please her hostess which no hired “companion” would have done for her, or, at least, not half so graciously for fee or favour. “You will kill me, you wicked boy,” said Aunt Eleanor, “if you take the mean advantage of being her husband to carry that dear girl away from Stanbrook.” In fact, it was not without difficulty and much indignant remonstrance that we contrived to get away from the Rectory even for our honeymoon. I used the opportunity of the temporary enfranchisement to take my

darling abroad, and the thorough change of scene she thus experienced was of the greatest value to her in effacing her sad recollections of the Priory and its inmates. On this account we prolonged our absence, and were only hurried back at last by a half-illegible note from Mrs. Hastings, whose handwriting was generally the pink of perfection, adjuring us to return to the Rectory forthwith if we wished to see her husband alive. Then my heart reproached me for having played the truant, though, indeed, I had not done so from selfish motives, and poor Gerty was so distressed, that half the benefit which her holiday had wrought in her seemed to have disappeared at the ill news. Throughout our journey home, which was accomplished with extraordinary speed, our talk was almost exclusively of kind Uncle Ralph, and of the blow that threatened us, or, even at that moment, might have already fallen. We had telegraphed the hour of our arrival

at Kirkdale, and at the station found the carriage waiting to carry us to the Rectory. But, alas! the footman, who met us on the platform, was in deep mourning, and I perceived at once that we had reached home too late.

“He is gone, then?” whispered I to the man.

“Oh, yes, sir; and now that it is so, even missus herself, I think, feels it a happy release.”

“Good heavens! Then did he suffer so much?”

“Well, sir, just as you have always known him, only wusser—a wheezing and a waddlin——”

“It must be the dog!” cried Gertrude, almost in hysterics, not from laughter, but from the revulsion from wretchedness to relief that she thus suddenly experienced.

“Oh, yes, miss—I mean marm—it were the poor doag. He be buried in the corner of the croquet-ground, underneath

the cypress-tree, and a mossy lion is to be put over it."

Upon once more re-perusing Aunt Eleanor's scrawl, we perceived that she had not mentioned her husband by name, though, of course, we had never doubted that the phrase, "If you wish to see my darling alive," had reference to him and him alone. At first my wife and I were very indignant, believing that this dubiety of expression had been intentional—that it was a pious fraud, on Aunt Eleanor's part, to have us home. But when we saw her, it was plain that she had written out of the fulness of her heart.

"Your uncle? Not a bit of it," whimpered she, contemptuously, upon our telling her of our mistake. "When he comes to lose me, I trust he will show more feeling than he did for my poor darling."

A bitterness which, the rector privately explained to me, had its origin in his refusal to ask for the intercessions of his

congregation in favour of the moribund animal. For six months the household wore the garb of woe for the deceased; after which, to my great content, my aunt's affections transferred themselves to Chico, in consequence of some sympathetic observation he had uttered *à propos de bottes*, but supposed by her to have reference to her departed favourite. Nevertheless, she would often interrupt her game at croquet—and more especially when she was on the losing side—to visit the mausoleum, and drop the silent tear on Nelly's remains.

Afterwards there were worse losses with us, that have left a void in our hearts up to this day. My wife and I live alone now—for Heaven has not vouchsafed us children—and the memory of dear Uncle Ralph and his wife has been, for many a year, all that has remained of them; but we are still in, the old house, the present rector preferring to receive rent for it and reside elsewhere. I have been an idle man all my life, except

that for some years I devoted myself, with no very marked success, to poetic composition; yet I am by no means an unhappy one. If the general public did not appreciate my muse as she deserved, my wife's admiration made up for their indifference, and I now repose upon my laurels. Stanbrook is not so much "out of the world" as it used to be, yet enough so to retain its quiet attractions. Our most frequent visitor is Mr. Wilde, who, having given up practice, often occupies our spare room to the satisfaction of us both. Sometimes, though rarely, we discourse to him of those events which, happening when we were little more than boy and girl, seem to have exhausted, as it were, at its commencement all the romance life had in store for us; at others, we converse of those who lived beneath our roof before us, and whose love for us has hallowed it. From my study-window I can see the churchyard where the good old rector lies beside his Eleanor; and where, not far

removed from them, lie the remains of Brother Alec, which my uncle caused to be brought thither from Sandibeach. There is another grave, too, beside Nelly's splendid "mossy lion," in our garden. Beneath a rose-tree, on which he was once wont to climb and cling in the summer time, lies poor Chico. He was very old before he died. His scarlet plumage faded like a veteran's coat, though his tongue ran on, especially at night, with all the garrulity of age. Grown very infirm and sick, however, he would at last only shake his head despondingly, as though there were no hope, in answer to inquiries as to the state of his health; so that when he did really die, which happened out of doors in the July sunshine, the finding of his voice again quite electrified us. "Dead, dead!" cried he, "think of that!" and fell lifeless from his perch into my wife's arms.

There is one circumstance which I must not forget to narrate to my readers (it was

many a year after its occurrence before I dared to tell it to my wife), since it explains a certain incident, which might have been a catastrophe, that has been left unsolved throughout these pages. I have said that an *escritoire* belonging to the late Mrs. Raeburn had passed into our possession. It had been placed in my aunt's *boudoir*, and Gerty used to write her letters upon it. She one day complained to me that, though it stood evenly enough upon its legs, it would occasionally rattle when pushed, as though some hinge or other metallic part of it was out of order. I accordingly entered upon an investigation of the interior, when the following discovery took place: my aunt was in the room at the time, engaged at her own desk, but Gertrude, most fortunately, was occupied elsewhere about the house, of which the whole management had been long deputed to her. Not being able to find the cause of the rattling, I took out all the drawers of the *escritoire* and then turned it right

over, whereupon something fell out with a jingle.

“What is it?” inquired my aunt, looking up with some curiosity from her letters. “What on earth is it?” she repeated, since I did not reply.

“Not much,” said I; “only this, which must have got lodged behind some of the woodwork.”

And I held a penny between my finger and thumb.

“Ah, you may depend upon it that woman had put that by against a rainy day,” observed my aunt, contemptuously. “I should not have been astonished had you found a farthing done up in cotton wool. It makes me quite in a passion to hear Gertrude speak so respectfully of the old miser.”

“Mrs. Raeburn was never a favourite of yours, Aunt Eleanor, was she?” returned I, gravely.

“A favourite? No, indeed! I had the

worst possible opinion of her. Nothing that you could possibly tell me of her would surprise me. My only wonder was that she died in her bed."

And yet I could have surprised my aunt at that very moment by telling her what I had really found in Mrs. Raeburn's desk. It was not a penny, but the key belonging to the chain of our skiff, which had been missing ever since that adventure on the lake which had so nearly proved fatal. I knew at once that it was Mrs. Raeburn who, while Gertrude left her in the boat-house, had removed the plugs out of the punt, and afterwards stolen this key, so that the skiff could not be used. Why she had retained it in that secret place, instead of throwing it into the lake, I could not guess. Perhaps, when her object had been attained, it had been her intention to secretly restore it, for her sense of the rights of property was always acute. At all events, the imprudence, as it turned out,

had done her no harm. I could not think worse of her than I already did. She had tried to murder Gertrude twice instead of once, that was all; in the first instance, to be sure it chanced that I also was included in the design, but that was a mere incidental circumstance, which I have no doubt she would have avoided if she could, and which she had perhaps regretted. I put the key in one of my uncle's cupboards, where in due time it was found, to the great bewilderment of the household. The rector protested he had searched for it in that very place himself half-a-dozen times, a statement received with scornful incredulity by Aunt Eleanor.

“It was fortunate, at all events, you must allow, my dear,” said she, “that you didn't horsewhip that pedlar.”

The key is in use; but a little machine of steel, which my readers would recognise, lies unused and rusted in that tin box, labelled “Mr. Hastings's securities,” which once orna-

mented the attorney's office shelves. I keep it as a memento of the narrow escape which my unconscious darling had from the jaws of death, and never look upon it without thanking Heaven for her deliverance. She has been the best and truest wife to me that ever man had. At first, like all other young couples, we had our little tiffs, but the faithful Chico's advice—I must say most freely offered—of “Kiss and be friends,” was always welcomed. Now we are grown far too wise, and, alas! too old, for even those lovers' quarrels.

The period of our lives at which the events occurred that I have here narrated is so far back, that it seems to belong to some other life, quite different from that which we have so long lived together. Of Mark Raeburn's death we never heard, but I am persuaded that his shattered constitution could not have long sustained him in his involuntary exile. No legal steps were ever taken to pursue him in the United States, whither

he was reported to have fled; and I do not doubt that his son's ready wit may there have found a market. At all events, among the names mentioned as belonging to the New York Tammany Ring was that of John Raeburn, and it certainly would seem a field peculiarly adapted to his undoubted abilities.

THE END.

CHILDREN I HAVE MET.

CHILDREN I HAVE MET.

CHAPTER I.

UPON a certain Christmas Eve, not many years ago, I was in a train on the North-Western Railway, bound for London. It is the fashion to express pity for persons of my mature age who are obliged to travel upon that festive season, when they ought to be "by rights" in their chairs by their own hearth, surrounded by laughing child-faces, and looking forward—not without some apprehension—to snap-dragon; but I did not feel any commiseration for myself whatever. My home was in town, and I should meet there with such a loving welcome, I well knew, as would compensate me

for any inconvenience of my present position. As for the child-faces, they indeed were not awaiting me, but since I had never known such, they would not be missed. I was content to picture to myself the bright glad face of her who had been my own true wife for near a quarter of a century, and which, if not so fair, was ten times as dear to me as on the day on which I had beheld it first. The battle of life had been a hard one for me, and in my secret heart I believe I should have lost it had she not stood by my side; for in that warfare the non-combatants count for much.

Good wives are the music that puts man in heart, as the martial band inspires the soldier; only in their case it plays right on throughout the fight, now soft, now loud, but ever heard till death comes to us or them. They are the hospital staff, who bind up our wounds and nurse us tenderly, when the battle has gone sore against us; and they are the chaplains also, who, taking

advantage of our weakness, would lead us—God bless them!—to the skies, of which we have lost sight in all that smoke and turmoil. I would not have said this to my Nelly for a kingdom—for these angels are human, after all—but such was the thought that I entertained about her as the express flew through the falling snow, which had clothed all objects with its dazzling robe, as though it were attiring earth as a bride for heaven.

As the day drew on—for my journey was a long one—and the sunbeams faded, those bridal garments become those of death, and the look of the vast snow-shroud made me shiver. What would life become, thought I, if *my* sunbeam were to cease, and I should be left alone, without even that reflection of it to comfort me such as the widower sees, or thinks he sees, in the eyes of his children? A selfish thought indeed, but are not all our thoughts selfish, even when they are busied with those who are far dearer to us than self

itself? If she did die, would the religion which I professed prove indeed a solace? Would there be any actual consolation in the belief that we should meet again where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, and where all the conditions of our existence must needs be wholly changed? I am not a sentimental man—far from it; I plume myself, with reason, upon my practical character. “Will it Wash?” is the vulgar but expressive phrase—borrowed from a connection of many years with a certain Manchester warehouse—which I am accustomed to apply to matters in general. To many a plain man of mature years and of the middle class, who has no pretensions to be considered a philosopher, such thoughts, or others like them, have doubtless sometimes come for a brief space, to be dissipated by the first material incident. The carriage passing over the points at the terminus, and shaking us all up a little, cut the thread of my slender speculations, and set me won-

dering, as our long train banged and clattered into the station, whether there would be a sufficiency of cabs to supply our needs. I had not much luggage, but there was a box containing a certain Christmas present for my Nelly about which I was solicitous, and I repaired at once to the luggage-van to look after it. "Of course, it is the last box," was upon the tip of my impatient tongue, as trunks, imperials, and hat-boxes were poured out upon the platform, and ever and anon the "By your leave" of the porter with his iron-wheeled barrow made my keen sense of the rights of property succumb to the care of life and limb; but as it happened, I had this time underrated the malice of destiny; the box was not there at all. The luggage-van yawned before me with nothing in it; and with my heart full of bitterness and thoughts of action at law for loss of goods in transit, I turned upon my heel, and almost overset a little woman of five years old or so, with a look of wistfulness

in her tear-wet eyes of blue that would have melted Herod.

“What is it, my dear?” inquired I, stooping my ear to the level of her rosebud of a mouth.

“Gibbinth,” said she, laying her small hand upon my arm.

“Give you what, my darling?” It was plain she was not a beggar; indeed, I should have used the phrase of a “lady’s child” in describing her, had not her woful little face put all ideas of her social rank out of my mind. She was well and warmly clad, as suited with the snowy night, and had a seal-skin muff hanging round her neck, into which, so soon as she found she had attracted my attention, she replaced her little hands.

“You *are* Gibbinth?” continued she, looking at me anxiously from top to toe, as though to discover for herself some distinctive mark of the Gibbins family.

“No, my dear,” said I; “I am not.” It

was impossible to be angry with such a tiny creature, but I certainly did not feel flattered at being taken for any such person. If it had been Montmorenci or Howard, the mistake might have been intelligible enough: but Gibbins!

“If you are not Gibbinth, where can Gibbinth be?” continued the little maiden; “the Dutchman has been in my eyes for ever so long.”

I had never heard the metaphor about the Dutchman (who, by-the-by, turned out to be the Dustman), but it was evident that the poor little thing was sleepy and tired. The passengers had by this time all departed, and, besides the officials, there was no one visible beneath the roof of that ghastly station save myself, this little one, and a single cabman, who was making intermittent signs to me with his whip—as though he were moved by clock-work—that he was waiting there for my convenience, and that he hoped any longer delay would be con-

sidered in the fare. A feeling began to creep over me that I had done some wrong to this poor little scrap in not being Gibbins, as she had expected, and that she had some sort of claim upon me in consequence. In vain I said to myself that that "wouldn't wash," and called up all the precepts of a long and successful commercial career to justify the great principle of non-interference. The most that they could do for me was to suggest my shifting the responsibility upon somebody else, and referring the matter to the railway officials.

As I moved away to where "Inspector's Office" was inscribed over a doorway, my small acquaintance again laid her little hand upon my wrist, not as a grown-up lady takes a gentleman's arm, but with a certain sense of assured dependence, that it was impossible to ignore or to resist.

If I was not Gibbins, that tiny pressure seemed to say I was in Gibbins's place, and the future conduct of affairs, so far as she

was concerned, was no longer in her hands, but mine.

“Mr. Inspector,” said I, when I had found that officer, “what is the meaning of this little lady being all alone here?”

“Well, sir, I was in hopes that you could have told *us* that.” He took off his cap, which had a gold band round it, not in my honour, as I supposed, but for my small companion to admire and handle (it had been, as I afterwards discovered, her plaything for the last six hours, in the intervals of his official business). “We all thought that you were Gibbins come at last.”

“I am nothing of the sort,” said I testily. “I never saw this”—here she looked up from the cap with such an astonished gaze, caused by my harsh tones, that I felt quite ashamed of myself—“I say I never before set eyes upon this little lady in all my life.”

“I am sorry for it, sir,” answered the

inspector, "for she don't seem to have any other friend. She has been here for half the day, and more, in the waiting-room yonder; and whenever a train comes in, out she trots, and asks for Gibbins. It's an infamous shame of those who have sent a child like that up on a Christmas Eve, with nobody to meet her, at a great station like this; and I should like to have the whippin' of 'em."

"What's her name?" inquired I, in a whisper.

"Well, you had better ask *her*, sir; for none of us can make head or tail of it ourselves."

Then I stooped down, and put the first question in the Church Catechism to this poor little waif and stray.

"What is your name?"

"I'm Osey," replied she, looking up in surprise that such an obvious fact should not be already known to me.

"She means Rosey," explained the in-

spector ; "such a child as that can never pronounce her hars, bless you. It's plain to me that you ain't a family man, sir."

I had once, however, been within a very little of being so, and that was, in truth, the chief reason why I did not at once offer this delicate human waif the shelter of our home.

Some years ago, I had met, within a few streets of my own door, an ayah, an Indian nurse, with perhaps the fattest child in her arms which England has yet produced, and who had lost her way ; she could understand a little English, but could speak no more of it than informed me that her master's name was "Jone," evidently Bengalee for Jones. As to where he lived, she had no notion, except that it was in the direction of the setting sun, which for London is a somewhat vague address.

She had a robe of white, which contrasted strikingly with her black and shining face ; she had a ring through her nose, of more

splendour, I should say, than value ; and a pair of very lavishly embroidered slippers turned up at the toes.

Altogether, she was not a desirable person for a gentleman in my line of business to be seen going about with, between six and seven in the afternoon, when his friends and neighbours are all returning from the City.

I felt at the time that she “wouldn’t wash,” and indeed it would have been of no use if she did ; yet I could scarcely leave her to wander about all night with that enormous child ; she was very tired already, it was evident, although not hungry ; people had offered her buns, it seemed, in great profusion, and one woman had nearly killed her with a bottle of ginger-beer (an article I believe forbidden by the Hindu faith) ; and of the use and value of money she was utterly ignorant ; in short, I was obliged to bring her home, which I did, accompanied by a mob of about forty street-boys, and

a policeman in the distance ; I had told him of her calamity, and he could suggest no remedy beyond the station-house, but the situation interested him.

By the skilful cross-examination of my wife, it was elicited from the ayah that she had gone out for a walk that morning with the child, and had been walking ever since, probably in a circle.

“But Jones must be the greatest idiot in Great Britain,” said I, “to send a nurse out with his child who can’t speak English, and who doesn’t know her way.”

“Perhaps he didn’t want to see either of them again,” observed my wife, with dismal sagacity.

Then I perceived what a very unwashable material this article I had become responsible for might turn out to be : to have a strange child on one’s hands for life was bad enough, but to adopt a black woman with a ring through her nose and turn-up slippers ! It might be that we were about to entertain

an angel unawares, but I am bound to say she didn't look like it.

"I suppose she must have sheets to her bed?" said my wife doubtfully, when discussing the arrangements for the night.

"Yes, yes; her colour is fast enough," returned I gloomily; "she is not an Ethiopian serenader."

Not a syllable indeed did she sing or say, beyond "Yes" or "No," and "Jone," while she remained under our roof, which was only for twelve hours; nor did the fat child open its mouth except for food, which it devoured voraciously.

After breakfast the next morning came Jones (of India), whom the police had informed of the asylum which his offspring had received. He swore in Hindustanee at the ayah, boxed the child's ears for being frightened at his father's violence, and then expressed his thanks to my wife (for I was gone to the City) for her "injudiciou^s hospitality." "I am sure your husband meant

well," he was good enough to say, "but I should have had much less trouble if he had left matters to the police."

It was the remembrance of this *fiasco* that made me even more practical than usual on the present occasion, and caused me to hesitate in constituting myself "Rosey's" temporary guardian.

"You have told me your Christian-name, my pretty child, but what is your surname?"

"My turname?" It was plain that I might as well have asked her the explanation of the Schleswig-Holstein difficulty, at that time at its *acmé* of complexity.

"What is your papa's name?"

She shook her head till the golden curls fell over her sweet face as the summer wind scatters the laburnum.

"And mamma's?"

"Mamma? Me no mamma," answered she quietly, as she buttoned and unbuttoned the chin-strap of the inspector's cap; an in-

difference far more pathetic to behold than any tears.

“But where is your home, Rosey?”

“Home?” Even that word had no meaning for her, it seemed; and yet her dress and manner showed that she had experienced dutiful, if not kindly ministrations. Her unsuspecting trust and confidence told also the same tale.

“Are you at school, then, darling?”

“Et!”—here she brightened up, well pleased to find her questioner at last intelligible—“me at tool.”

“And where is your school, Rosey?”

Here she became a laburnum again; names and places were evidently not her strong point; she might have dropped from the skies themselves for all she knew of whence she came or whither she was going.

The station she had come from, the inspector said, was Crewe—a large manufacturing town and junction—so much was told by her ticket, and by the company’s

luggage label upon a large box that had come with her, but which had otherwise no address.

“What is to be done with her, Mr. Inspector?”

“Well, the woman in charge of the waiting-rooms will look after her for the night, I daresay. I would take her home myself, if I had not a house too full of brats already, though, Heaven knows, I don’t want to lose any of ’em. Every lady as has seen the child took notice of her, and gave her tarts and things in the refreshment-room; but when it comes to taking her home with them—why, that is quite another matter. It’s so few wives, and still fewer husbands, as dares to do it, you see.”

“Well, this is my card,” said I; “and I will take her to my wife as a Christmas present. I suppose Mr. Gibbins will turn up to-morrow morning at latest.”

“Well, if the worst comes to the worst, you can but send her to the work’us, you

know—poor little innocent soul;” and with that he kissed her.

If I had not been of so practical a nature, and if the regulations of the company had not forbidden it, I could have almost given that inspector five shillings; as it was, I left that amount with him for incidental expenses—giving me early news of Gibbins, or what not—and then I called a cab.

“Rosey, my dear, I shall take you home with me,” said I: “you must want rest and supper.”

“But Tosey must tum too,” said Rosey.

“By all means.” I thought Tosey was some doll that she had left in the waiting-room, and accompanied her thither to get it, while her box was being lifted on to the cab.

In one of those vast and cheerless apartments, with which railway travellers who arrive too soon, or too late, are so well acquainted, I found the woman in charge

pacing up and down the place with a large bundle in her arms.

“Hullo, missey!” said she: “so you have found your friend at last. I must say, sir,” added she, addressing herself to me, “that you have given me a great deal of trouble—though I don’t grudge it, poor little fellow—in minding this boy for the whole afternoon. He’s as good as gold for one of his years, but of course he’s dog-tired, and ought to have been in his cot hours ago.”

“Why, what boy is that?” inquired I, with a vague sense of apprehension.

“Dat my itty brodder Tosey,” explained my small companion. “Now, Tosey, tum alon’; the coachey-poachey is waiting.”

There were two of them! No one who has not had twins unexpectedly presented to them, can picture to themselves my feelings at that moment. There was, however, nothing for it but to say with the pincushion

—nay, with two pincushions—“Welcome, little strangers.”

At the word “coachey-poachey,” as though it had been an open sesame to his young affections, Tosey held out his arms to me, with a wild chuckle, at the same time kicking his little legs like one learning to swim. It was a terrible moment, for I did not know how to handle so delicate an article; it was as though a parlour-maid who has never been “out” before should begin with washing up a service of eggshell china; though Tosey did not look so much like the outside of the egg as the inside, *poached*. So white—for the poor little soul was wan and weary—so soft, so dimpled, so wabbly, and so warm he was, it seemed as though the touch of a finger would have broken him.

He was a fair-complexioned child, like his sister; but his eyes were a soft brown, whereas Rosey’s were as blue as the skies in June; and though, I suppose, a year younger

than she, he had a look of thought and gravity (with wrinkles, too, everywhere) which might have become his own grandfather. I have since had some reason to believe that, in another state of existence, Tosey had been king of the fairies, and that the cares of his tiny kingdom still weighed upon him; but this is mere conjecture. . He permitted himself great excitements, but, having expressed his feelings, sank always into a state of philosophic reflection, as though to examine whether or no they had been justified. Thus, on catching sight of the cab-horse, he cried "Jee-jee," and jerked himself so violently in my arms that I thought for the moment we had both fallen backwards; then immediately afterwards he became stolid, silent, and statuesque. I seized upon this opportunity to place him on the back-seat of the vehicle, where I could have my eye on him, and where, being wedged in by his sister and her multitudinous wraps, I thought he would keep his equi-

librium. This, however—although throughout the catastrophe he preserved his gravity—was by no means the case, for no sooner did the wheels begin to move, than both of the children fell forward, knocking my open purse out of my hand, from which I had just been paying the waiting-woman, and scattering its contents upon the floor of the cab, which, as usual, had as many holes as a cullender. What was the precise extent of my pecuniary loss, I never ventured to calculate, but certainly I did something to realise the dream of Dick Whittington in paving the neighbourhood of Euston Square with gold.

Property, however (except in the eye of the law), is of less consequence than life, and all my energies were directed to preserve my fellow-travellers. Fortunately, they were so wrapped in clothing, that they could scarcely have been hurt—unless they had fallen on their faces, which they did not, but quite the reverse—had they dropped

from the top of St. Paul's; but for the rest of the journey I placed one on one of my knees, and one on the other, and held them each with one arm as well. There is a famous picture (not the least like me, however) called the *First Cradle*, which accurately represents my position in the four-wheeler; nor did I dare to change it even by a hair-breadth, for in a second or two both of my little friends had fallen asleep, and it was clear by their sweet faces that it would have been a crime to wake them.

Rosey was away in Paradise, where the only idolatry is baby-worship—the Peris were handing her about from one to the other, and she had a smile for every one. Tosey was back in Elfland, recounting his adventures among mortals, accompanied by philosophic reflections. Not a sigh escaped them, not a movement stirred their tender limbs; the snow, that was falling more thickly than ever, could not have come

from the skies more innocent and pure than they were.

I had not the least doubt of the nature of *their* reception from my Nelly ; my apprehensions were solely upon my own account. That ayah business, though it had happened long ago, still rankled in her memory. If she had been in my place, she would, I knew, have done exactly as I had done, and I should have expostulated with her upon acting upon impulse, and giving way to sentiment upon Christmas Eve. It is so different being philanthropic one's-self, and bearing the inconvenience of the philanthropy of other people.

The astonishment of our parlour-maid upon perceiving her master return with these unexpected guests, was such that she actually forbore to remark upon them, as I carried them into the house.

"Is that you, George?" cried my wife's delighted voice from the drawing-room floor.

"I am not quite sure, my dear," was my reply; for indeed I had by this time begun to entertain suspicions of my own identity: "you had better come down and see."

"Ah! you nice old darling, that is to look at the Christmas present you wrote about, *I know*."

"Well, no," said I; "that is gone astray" (I had up to then forgotten all about that unhappy box); "but I have brought you two others instead."

"You dear, delightful, generous —— Oh, my goodness, whose children have you got there?"

"Gibbins's!"

For the moment that answer proved sufficient, for Rosey and Tosey had both opened those masked batteries, their wondering eyes, and silenced by their unexpected fire, my wife could only gasp, and gaze from one to the other.

"Mum—mum—mum—mum," ejaculated

Tosey very rapidly, with the air of a discoverer.

“Why, he takes me for his mamma, I do declare!” continued Nellie, with enforced admiration, as she folded him in her arms. “And are you his sister, my pretty dear?”

“Et.” This monosyllable was elongated and dwelt upon with conscious pride. “Me and Tosey is sitter and brudder.”

“But where on earth are their parents? Where did you pick them up, and why did you bring them home?”

“They were left at the station, and never called for,” explained I; “and since there was no sleeping accommodation for them in the waiting-room—which must, moreover, be rather a lonely place for a nursery after business hours, beside which it was snowing hard; and being Christmas Eve, when, above all times, little children should be had in remembrance——”

“Jane, bring some tea and cake as soon as you can get it,” interrupted my wife;

“and tell Elizabeth to get the spare room ready. She had better sleep with the poor little dears, for they are too young to be left alone, and, of course, it will only be for one night.”

“Of course not,” said I cheerfully; “Gibbins is certain to turn up in the morning, just as Mr. Jones did.”

My object was to draw a deduction from experience that might inspire confidence in these young persons being taken off our hands, of which in reality I by no means felt assured; but I had made a mistake in mentioning Jones of Bengal.

“We shall doubtless get no thanks for whatever we do,” remarked my wife tartly, at the same time taking off Rosey’s multitudinous wraps with tender solicitude. “I have no patience with wretches who leave their little children alone and friendless in the great waste of London. I wonder where they expect to go to?”

“Yes, and where they expect their chil-

dren to go to," rejoined I. "However, it isn't Rosey's fault, nor Tosey's."

If the children had looked beautiful in their furs and wraps, they appeared still more attractive now that they were in their under-garments, which showed their grace of movement. Rosey's limbs were very slender, but she climbed actively enough into the chair that had been set for her at the tea-table, though not before she had seen Tosey's more plump proportions already seated in his. It was plain that she still considered him under her charge and conduct. When my wife cut her a slice of cake, she passed it on to her brother, and broke it into small pieces for him, as one breaks bread to feed the birds; nor, while attending to his physical comforts, did she neglect his manners. "What does Tosey say?" inquired she, "to the lady who gives him cake?"

Tosey stared at her in shocked surprise. Could she not see that he was eating?—

indulging in the only occupation in which (as she must be aware) he took at present any satisfaction? Nay, even upon the lowest ground, who could be expected to reply to abstract questions, who has his mouth quite full of currant cake? Again she appealed to his sense of politeness, and this time he transferred his eyes from her fair face to the central ornament of the ceiling, at which he stared, and continued to stare (though eating all the time) with an intensity that riveted our own attention also.

“Now what does Tosey say when he is dood, and has had his cake?” repeated the other, more persuasively even than before.

“Moa” (more).

At this my wife burst out laughing, and threw her arms about his neck. “Did you ever hear such a sensible child,” cried she, “to say More instead of Ta? Why, it’s human nature in a nut-shell.” It was one form of human nature, no doubt; but it

was another—though, alas ! one not so much dwelt upon by the theologians — to see Rosey's unselfish solicitude for Tosey's comfort, as though a nightingale should take a wren under its wing, and tend it. And the wren acknowledged her loving service. Tosey declined the offer of my wife's assistance to descend from his chair, with a certain austere calmness. "You mean well, I have no doubt, my good woman," his manner seemed to say ; "but this honour is reserved for another : it pleases her, and I am disposed to please her, when there is no temptation to do otherwise." So Rosey's outstretched arms received him, after his repast ; and in their loving hold he instantly fell asleep, like a despot gorged with wine and meat, in the embrace of some favoured slave. My wife carried him to bed herself ; while Elizabeth carried Rosey, a burden scarcely heavier than he — her blue eyes heavy with sleep, her golden hair streaming behind her like a sheaf of stars. The painter

who drew Jacob's Ladder with the angels ascending it, must have seen some such spectacle as that, I think, on his own stairs at home.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN my wife came down that night, after seeing the children put to bed, I was, of course, prepared to tell all that happened at the railway station; but, to my surprise, she did not pay much attention to the matter. When I ventured, however, to suggest that the careless Gibbins might not even turn up on the morrow to claim his own, she evinced considerable interest.

“What! George; do you really think it possible that the man may neglect his children to that extent? Why, if he doesn’t come to-morrow, there would be no more reason why he should come the next day,

nor, for that matter, why he should come at all."

"Even that, of course, is possible, my dear," said I. "The poor little things will, in that case, keep Christmas with us, I suppose; one would hardly like to send them to the workhouse on Christmas Day."

"The workhouse! Who said a word about the workhouse?"

For the moment, I thought a piece of my nose was gone; I had never been so "snapped up" by my little wife before. "I was only hinting, my dear, that the law did not compel us to maintain other people's children; and if the worst came to the worst, that we could get rid of these two little people."

"Get rid of them!" echoed my wife, with the clash and sharpness of a pair of shears. "Who wants to get rid of them? Why, if a black kitten strays into the house, we keep it, because it is said to bring a blessing; and are not two such heavenly children as

those up yonder a blessing in themselves! O George!" continued she, dropping her voice all of a sudden, and speaking quite soft and low, "I know you don't mean to be hard with 'em; you would not have brought 'em home at all, had you meant that; but if you had seen those two, as I have just seen them, you could never have said a harsh word concerning them, even in jest. When Elizabeth and I had taken that wee creature's clothes off by the fire, and he was but in his little shift (for we had no nightgown to give him—though I shall take care he has plenty to-morrow, if I cut up my own), he suddenly woke up, and as we were putting him to bed, cried out: 'Where's Osey?' In an instant that sweet girl was at his side, and with her little arm round his neck. 'Pairs!' said he. For the moment, I really thought the child had asked for fruit; and I felt quite ashamed that good thoughts had been so much farther from me than from him, when I saw those little ones

kneel down together by the bed-side and pray. Rosey said the Lord's Prayer aloud—such a mess as she made of some of the words! and yet they were more touching to listen to than any I had ever heard from a reading-desk—and Tosey repeated it after her. It seemed to me as though all the angels in heaven must have stopped their music to listen to 'em. Then they kissed one another—it was better than going to church to see them do it—and as we laid them down side by side, they dropped asleep in each other's arms."

"But, my dear Nelly," remonstrated I, "there is nothing to cry about, surely, in all that; it only shows they have been well brought up."

"But they've got no mother. Think of *that!*" sobbed my wife, who had by this time broken down altogether. "Little dots like that to be motherless, and to have a father like this Gig—Gig—Gibbins, who cares nothing about them!"

"I don't know that Mr. Gibbins *is* their father, my dear; and how, may I ask, did you find out that they had no mother?"

"Why, because they did not mention her in their little prayers. Do you suppose they would not have done so, had she been in existence? 'Dod bless us both and make us dood;' that was all they said besides the Lord's Prayer."

"And quite enough too, my dear," said I, softly; for somehow—I suppose it was because the little creatures had taken to me so trustfully—I was more moved than I chose to own.

"Oh, quite enough indeed," assented my wife, "especially since *He has* made them good—as good as gold."

The use of that familiar metaphor—though it was not a little incongruous in its application—brought me back to the realities of life. "Fortunately, my dear," said I, "we have plenty of money to support these little ones, whom Fate has thus

thrown upon our hands, in case they have really been deserted."

"There is no chance of that," answered my wife dolorously, as though the desertion of small children was too delightful an idea to be realised. "Gibbins is sure to come to-morrow, with his heartlessness and insolence (just as Jones did), to carry away his property—just as if they were so much luggage. If he does not, we are bound to advertise all about them. Moreover, there is their box: of course, if we don't hear from him soon, we must open that, and it is sure to contain something that will identify them, and oblige us to restore them to their belongings. O George, dear George, what a wrench it will be to me!"

Then I began to understand that my poor childless wife had suffered that passionate affection for small children, which abides in all who are worthy of the name of woman, to twine itself about our new-comers, as creeping flowers upon dainty trellis-work

will twine and grow till both are one; and for the moment I almost repented that I had opened my doors to those unexpected guests. "My darling," said I softly, "though Heaven has denied us children, it has given us another blessing—wealth; and if it would be any pleasure to you to adopt a child——"

"No, no," interrupted she, sobbing; "I should not care for that; but in this case it seems as if Heaven itself had sent us these little ones—all on a Christmas Eve too—and that sweet darling actually said 'Mum—mum,' and put his arms about me, as though I *was* his mother—and then you see he had never known his real one."

This was a true womanly touch, with jealousy as well as love in it, which I felt did not admit of reply. If Heaven had sent the children to us indeed, I might well have argued, Heaven would probably permit us to keep them in spite of Gibbins; but women draw no consolation from logic;

indeed, it is my experience that, in connection with the decrees of Providence, they even resent it.

I dreamt that night that I was the master of a national school, and that my wife was a baby-farmer, and I was wakened in the morning by the most singular noise imaginable; it sounded like the chuckling of hens, the crowing of some infinitesimal bantam cock, and the splashing of something in water.

“Why, good gracious, my dear, there are poultry and ducks in the house!”

There was no reply; my consort was not by my side, but the crowing and chuckling continued, mingled with shouts of merriment, proceeding from the apartment above my head. When I hear laughter, I wish to be acquainted with the joke that has produced it, just as when one hears a cork drawn, one is inquisitive about the wine in the bottle, and I put on my dressing-gown at once, and went quietly upstairs.

The sight that greeted me in the spare room, hitherto solely dedicated to bachelor adults, was very remarkable. I had come upon a party engaged in a rite of baby-worship. My wife and Elizabeth were putting Tosey in his bath before the fire; while Rosey, in a flannel dressing-gown ten sizes too large for her, was sitting on the rug in a rapture of appreciation. Tosey was standing up in the warm water, holding on to the edge of the bath, and apparently addressing some constituency in the most humorous manner and at the top of his voice. Every now and then, a joke so tickled him that he cast himself backward, and was picked up pink and palpitating, only just in time, as it seemed to me, to save his life. The applause that succeeded each performance of this feat, evidently gave him unbounded satisfaction; he had thrown off all his philosophy with his clothes, and was merely bent upon experiments with respect to the displacement of water, in

which, to judge by the puddles on the floor, he had been very successful. He acknowledged the accession to his audience in my arrival by a shout of laughter so shrill and small, and at the same time so full of triumph, that no musician on earth could—for expression at least—have competed with him; and then he said: “Hullo! all ight,” and fell backwards under water. It was perfectly ridiculous that three grown persons and a half should have been so moved by so insignificant an object—yet we *were* all laughing as heartily as he. The little naked boy, called Cupid, could hardly have shown himself more powerful than this his latest rival.

Presently, Christmas chimes began to peal from some bell-ringing steeple, and Tosey, standing in the water, and steadying himself by clinging to the side with one hand, held the other up—one tiny finger projecting from the rest—for silence. It was the prettiest “pictur’,” as Elizabeth observed,

one could conceive ; or rather, it was a piece of living sculpture such as Nature, R.A. (Real Artist), could alone have executed. At the same time, I felt my dressing-gown gently pulled, and looking down, I saw Rosey's sweet fair face turned upwards towards mine with parted lips. "A merry Kismas to you," said she, in a tone that had a music in it beyond that of any song, and with a look such as the angels use when wishing the like to one another.

"Only listen to the child!" cried my wife, delighted. "That was just because she heard the bells, you may depend on it."

"Why, Rosey, who taught you to say that, my darling?" said I, stooping to kiss her.

"Dodo."

"And who is Dodo?"

Here all was blank again. Neither Rosey nor Tosey could give us any information upon that point. Dodo was Dodo, whom

not to know argued ourselves most ignorant. It was certainly not the bird who is the despair of natural-historians; but beyond that, nothing certain could be discovered—until Gibbins turned up, or the box was opened.

The enactment that makes a holiday at the Post-office on Christmas Day had my hearty concurrence that morning, for at least no tidings could come by letter which should demand a parting with our little guests. Every ring at the door, however, my wife informed me, made her “heart go,” for fear it might be the herald of Gibbins; and it was not without some opposition on her part that I wrote out an advertisement for the *Times*, stating that two young children, answering to the names of Rosey and Tosey, were at present lodged beneath our roof, awaiting removal by their proprietor.

In leaving my address at the railway station, I had done, she urged, all that was reasonably to be expected of me; it was

there, if anywhere, that Gibbins would apply for the goods consigned to him; and to jog his memory, or to awaken his remorse for his neglect, was to fly in the face of Providence, and run an uncalled-for risk of losing the blessings it had vouchsafed us. If my wife showed herself somewhat lax in principle under this great temptation, she, on the other hand, exhibited a keen sense of moral responsibility as regarded the children themselves. She sent in to our neighbour, Mrs. Quiverful, for some Sunday toys—a message which produced a Noah's Ark and a Mosaic puzzle—and decided upon supplementing their elevating effect by taking Rosey to church with us. The occasion was evidently a novelty to her, and so far a treat; but she was very loath to leave her brother, whose tender years put his attendance at public worship out of the question. The promise of hearing the organ, however, and (I regret to say) the unauthorised prospect of its having waltzing figures upon it, which was

held out by Elizabeth, overcame her scruples, and, to the astonishment of the parish, our pew was for the first time embellished by the presence of a child. That many an eye was turned towards Rosey, as she sat with her little hand in mine, with admiring curiosity, was no reproach to our vicar's eloquence; no sculptured angel there, with hair blown back, and wings crosswise, no seraph painted on the pane, looked half so heavenly as she. Eager-eyed, she watched and listened, while the parson read, and the music rose and fell, but hushed as a mute bird. Once only did she break silence—when our doctor (according to his invariable custom) was called out from his conspicuous pew by his foot-page, when she observed: “Look, look; there’s a man *broke loose*,”—a remark that shook my gravity to its foundations.

In the afternoon, I went down to the railway station under pretence of making inquiry about my luggage, but in reality to

find out if there was any news of Gibbins. Those children were growing upon me so, that I felt it necessary to do my duty to their belongings—if belongings they really had—while the moral courage to do so still remained to me. My friend the inspector shook his head, and pronounced the whole affair to be “a plant” to get rid of the two children. “They will be on your hands, sir, it’s my opinion, until you think proper to send them to the workhouse.”

“You really think that, Mr. Inspector?”

“I am pretty sure of it, sir,” replied he despondently. “It is not the first time that such a thing has happened, to my own knowledge. Well, I am sure, sir, you are very kind.”

“Don’t mention it,” said I, “it’s Christmas Day, you know, and you have had a great deal of trouble about that luggage. Good morning to you.”

“But you are going away without it, sir!” And so I was. I felt, in fact, but

little interest, comparatively speaking, in the article in question, which, as it happened, had arrived safe enough ; and the sovereign I had given the man was for his “ opinion,” just as one gives a doctor or a lawyer one pound one for theirs—which are not generally so pleasant. Would it be possible, I wondered, to retain our little treasures by giving a pound or two to Gibbins himself? Was there any law against child-selling, as well as wife-selling, and if not, would Gibbins be authorised to treat? The loss of Tosey would, I knew, be to my wife a very serious blow, and however unreasonable it was in her so to feel it, it was only my duty to avert, by all lawful means, such a catastrophe. As to Rosey, I confess the dear child had taken such root in my heart, that I could not bear to think of parting with her, and especially to persons who had shown themselves so careless of their responsibilities. I knew that my position both in law and morals was untenable—I was

painfully aware that the whole transaction "would not wash,"—but something must surely be conceded to the feelings of a parent; and was not I *in loco parentis*—which is the same thing as a parent—to that heavenly child. Tosey, too, had distinctly—or as distinctly as he could—claimed my wife as his mamma, so that the chain of relationship might be said to be complete.

Nelly received my little Christmas present with gratitude, but without enthusiasm; a fact which, considering it was a new bonnet, will give the measure, to any of her own sex, of the extreme preoccupation of her mind.

"A thousand thanks, my dear," said she. "But was there any news of Gibbins?"

Then I thought it was really time to administer to her a lecture upon the vanity of human wishes, and on the great improbability of their being gratified on the

present occasion. I observed, how wrong it was of her, from every point of view, to nourish such vain and unprincipled expectations: in fact, I used every argument which I had deliberately rejected myself, and, in the end, had the satisfaction of perceiving that we should never be divorced upon the fashionable ground of "incompatibility" of character, inasmuch as they had precisely the same effect upon her as they had had on me.

"Mum-mum will never part from her Tosey, will she?" inquired she (I must say very foolishly) of the child himself, who was playing at her knee. "Say, never, my own darling." He looked up with preternatural gravity, and delivered (in the character of a dignitary of the Court of Chancery) his decree against any such separation: "Nedder." At the same moment, Rosey stole her little hand in mine, and whispered: "Me tay too."

If Gibbins had turned up just then, in

the imperative mood, I believe I should have put him in the water-butt and purchased a filter.

“But, my dear Nelly,” sighed I, “there is their box.”

“I wish it had been lost, like the bonnet,” answered she, bitterly.

“Still, since it *is* here, we are bound to open it, and thereby discover to whom these little guests of ours belong. We had better get it over at once, since every day will make it more difficult for you to part with them.”

So, on that Christmas night, when the children were fast asleep in each other's arms—a sight as full of Christmas thoughts as any sermon—my wife and I had the box brought into the parlour. It had no lock, so I had only to cut the ropes with my penknife, to know our fate; for, indeed, it had come to that: with such unconscious magic had those little ones bewitched us in a day and night, that to part with them

would have not only been a “wrench,” but a catastrophe. Perhaps it was the blessed Christmas-tide—wherein, above all seasons, little children assert their power—that had so worked with us ; but so it was. A mother whose task it is to look over the clothes, or toys, or other “fond records” of some lost darling, must be one of the most pitiable of God’s creatures ; but to her at least the worst has come ; the parting is over—whereas, to *us*, this little box might be the cradle or the grave of Hope. I felt that it was much more likely to prove the latter ; it was to the last degree improbable that Rosey and Tosey should remain as such—mere fairy-folk with fairy names—and nothing more, when we had made examination of its contents. Miss Rose Gibbins and Master Thomas Gibbins, of some seminary for young persons near Crewe, would presently be revealed to us in the most commonplace fashion, and demand to be given up to their “friends.” Nothing

occurs, however, as the paradoxical Frenchman tells us, except the Unlooked-for. Not a scrap of writing, whether on paper or linen, informed us of the personal identity of our little guests. Their Lilliputian garments, layer after layer of which we found arranged with the utmost neatness and order, were indeed all marked, but it was only with those names which Love, and not their god-fathers and god-mothers, had bestowed upon them—Rosey and Tosey. In some cases, it was worked upon the tiny linen in hair.

“They had a mother *then*,” whispered my wife significantly; and though no mother herself, I thought her judgment just upon that point. Moreover, the handwriting, where the names were written, was fine and delicate, like a lady’s hand, and not a servant’s; though, to my fancy (for this could be only guess-work), it lacked the firmness of health. I could not help building up the theory that the mother had been failing and fading,

without the strength to do much more than this slight loving service ; and Nelly thought the idea a probable one.

“In that case,” remarked I, “the careful packing and disposal of the clothes must have been done by another.”

“Of course,” returned my wife : “after her death, poor soul.”

“And yet we have not come upon a single article of mourning.”

“The woman who took the mother’s place was poor,” answered Nelly softly.

It was like enough. The mother had been poor herself, for though all the garments were in good repair, they had seen much service, and had darns and patches in them ; the latter, as my wife pointed out, let in with elaborate skill and care. The last layer was made up of baby-clothes, most exquisitely worked by hand.

“Good Heavens !” cried I, “is there, then, a *third* ?”

“No, no ! these were Tosey’s before he

was short-coated. How nice he must have looked in them, dear little fellow ! ”

The tears of my childless wife were falling fast upon the lengthy robe of state that had once enveloped Tosey's limbs.

“ My darling,” said I, “ you ought to be pleased, rather than cast down ; for nothing has come to light as yet which demands our parting with the children. If Gibbins would only——”

“ Look, look ! ” interrupted my wife, with a sharp cry. Below the last layer of clothes, and pasted on the bottom of the box, was a sheet of white paper, around which a clumsy attempt had been made with ink to rule a mourning border. In the centre of it was written, in a hand evidently unused to penmanship, the words, “ *Pity the motherless.* ”

“ These children, then, have been bequeathed to us, my dear,” said I, after a pause. My wife was greatly affected, and I was just a little taken aback myself. “ When

you are quite calm and collected, Nelly, we must consider whether we shall accept the legacy."

I had for my own part quite made up my mind to "administer," as the lawyers call it; but I thought the expression of doubt would rouse her, and do her good.

"Dear George," said she, without taking the least notice of my remark, but still poring over those appealing words, "I think this is Dodo's writing. She is some faithful nurse, who, finding herself unable to support these orphaned darlings, has sent them forth, trusting in God's providence to find them home and friends—and they *have* found them. How happy, how thankful I feel! They will now be our own for ever."

"My dear Nelly," said I gravely, "do not too much encourage a hope which, if it one day prove fallacious, will be bitter in your mouth indeed. These children are not orphans, or Dodo would have stated as much. "Pity the motherless," she says;

that is (I fear), those little ones who have no mother, but worse than no father—who have a father that has deserted them.”

“But *we* will not desert them.”

“By no means; only this man may turn up at any time, remember, and demand his own. Will you still accept them on such conditions?”

“I will,” replied she, firmly. “I look on them as Heaven’s own gift, and I believe that we shall be permitted to retain them.”

“Very good, my dear; so be it,” said I; but I had still my doubts, and grave ones.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN I wrote that I had my doubts about the adoption of Rosey and Tosey as our own children, it must not be understood that I entertained any idea of parting with them unless I should be compelled to do so ; I ought rather to have written that I had my fears. It seemed too good to be true that these little darlings should have come to us so unexpectedly, like a Christmas-box, and that we were to keep them for our own for ever.

The advertisement of their arrival had been already sent to the newspapers, and would doubtless elicit some reply, if not from their father, at least from those who had a

better claim to their custody than ourselves. As to Gibbins, I was inclined to disbelieve in him as an entity altogether. Dodo had probably stretched her imagination to its utmost limits in inventing him. She was compelled to tell the children that somebody would meet them at the end of their aimless journey, and she had called him Gibbins, a name which had at least the merit of being easily pronounceable. It was from their father that I chiefly feared molestation. I pictured him to myself as a selfish miscreant, who, without any natural affection for his offspring, might nevertheless resent their adoption by other people; or, if he found that we were really fond of them, might make use of his relationship to extort money by threats of demanding their custody. This would be a state of affairs which indeed "would never wash," and yet we should be powerless to avert it.

However, as time went on, and the advertisement remained unanswered, and no one

put in their claim for Rosey and Tosey, we began to have an unmitigated enjoyment in the possession of them. Being an idle man, and also because I had been hitherto a childless one, I gave myself up to them more than grown men generally do ; I deny that I spoilt them—indeed, whoever yet confessed to such a charge ? People did say indeed that I indulged them considerably ; but, in return, they indulged *me* in many ways, and especially with ungrudged opportunities of observation of their manners and habits, thoughts and small-talk, logic and feelings. These formed the prettiest study conceivable ; all Lilliput life was laid before me, with its springs and wires, and I am bound to say that I suffered no disenchantment by being admitted “ behind the scenes.” If the actors had been two boys, or two girls, it might have been otherwise, but with these two there were no jealousies, no jars, no quarrels. They were avoided in this manner ; Tosey had everything his own

way, and Rosey ministered to his pleasure. Her self-abnegation was complete; it was not "ask and have," because she anticipated his wants: her greatest trouble was when she was compelled to refuse him anything upon the ground that it would disagree with him; for all his desires were fixed on something to eat, and it was generally unwholesome. Not for a moment would I have it imagined that Tosey was a glutton—

"But Knowledge to his eyes its ample page,
Rich with the spoils of Time, had not unrolled."

Science, Literature, and Art, were for the present dead to him, and what had he to do but to eat? Many a discreet old gentleman who has retired from active life makes the same excuse with less reason; and as to selfishness, one does not consider a king to be selfish (and far less do we call him so), because he takes everything he wants without inquiring into the miserable details of how it is procured: it is enough that he

is graciously pleased to accept it from his devoted subjects. Moreover, it was by right divine—the genuine majesty of Love—that Prince Tosey ruled us. His nature was affectionate to an extreme degree, and his temper was flawless; some detractors said, indeed, that this last was never tried—that we pronounced it perfect, as one might praise a bridge that has never been *crossed*; but my wife and I despised such remarks. The dear child had a desire for having his own way which was far superior to caprice: it rose to genius. I happened to be present on a certain occasion when he said his nightly prayers, as usual at the dictation of his sister; when she got to “Thy will be done,” he declined to repeat that sentence, and moved an amendment. “No,” lisped he; “*my* will be done, not *thy* will: *it is Tosey’s choose this time.*” A revelation of human nature to its very depths! How many of us, who are ten times his age, echo his infant thought, though not in words!

It took all Rosey's eloquence and theology to convince him that this matter was not one of alternation and equality.

As for her, no such audacious ideas had ever intruded into her sweet thoughts; she was the most humble and reverent of human creatures, and while entertaining the quickest sense of injustice as respected others, never imagined that to be a wrong which interfered with her own wishes. As a teacher of religion and morals, she was, in fact, without peer. But she would doubtless have failed as a certificated schoolmistress—her grammar was original, infinitely superior, in my opinion, to that of the most well-informed persons, but it rejected the rules of syntax. Her sentences—probably from her entire freedom from egotism—began with “me” instead of “I,” and her pronunciation was far from distinct. A curious result of this latter peculiarity of his teacher came out in Tosey. When he had grown many months older, and was kneeling at Mum-mum's knees (she

was always "Mum-mum" now with him, and I was "Da-da," just as it should be), she detected in his devotions a certain roll in the word "Hallowed." What he did say, was, in fact, Harold—"Harold be thy name." "But, my dear child, what does that mean?" "I don't know," replied Tosey, frankly, "but I thought that made it more sense." A Lesson for Fathers (and Mothers) much more significant, I venture to think, and worthy of parental attention, than is contained in Wordsworth's poem of the Gilded Vane.

In spite of the early touch of heterodoxy to which I have alluded, Tosey was singularly devotional in his habits; he was by no means a goody-goody child, being full of humour and naturalness; but when there was a doubt of matters being arranged wholly to his satisfaction on this earthly ball, he would at once invoke Heaven to his assistance. He was once found upon his knees on the landing of the stairs, on his way down to dessert, and being subse-

quently interrogated on the matter, explained it thus: "I was praying," he said, "that there might be apples—and," added he triumphantly, as though he had annihilated a sceptic, "there *were* apples." As he got on in months, a taste for books—or rather for the pictures he found in them—developed itself; he became acquainted with all the leading events in Biblical history, and applied them to our own time with a facility that I have rarely heard equalled in the pulpit. Upon my wife being taken ill on one occasion, the ailment, however, being, as it happened, not very serious, nothing could exceed Tosey's concern and sympathy; "Supposing I had died," said she to him, when she was getting better, "Tosey would have been very sorry, would he not?"

"Mum-mum will never die," answered he confidently.

"Nay, but we must all do that, my darling."

"All but Mum-mum: *she will be taken*

up to heaven in a chariot of fire." And then he proceeded to describe the details of that incident, which was to take place from the back-garden, as being the locality, I suppose, most convenient for the start.

The philosophy of Tosey's character, discernible on our first acquaintance, became so marked as often to be embarrassing. He would pass hours in silent speculation, and evolve therein theories of the most startling character, and which struck at the root of everything. Indeed, some of them were so natural, as well as tremendous, that they were utterly unanswerable. It took all I knew, and more, to evade his inquiries. He would lay his tiny finger upon the anomalies of the scheme of creation with the most ruthless accuracy, though, it must be acknowledged, that, like some objectors of a larger growth, his propositions for amendment and reform were crude enough. He was cross-examining me upon one occasion on the nature of conscience, which (perhaps from

its inquisitive character) he assumed to be of the feminine gender.

“She knows everything, Da-da, does she?”

“Yes, Tosey.” I always confined myself as much as possible to generalities, for if Tosey once drove you into a corner, it was all over with you.

“And she is everywhere, is she?”

“Well, yes; she is everywhere, Tosey.”

“Then she’s in this ink-bottle, and I’ve *corked her up*—so we’ll have no more of Miss Conscience.”

It was impossible to explain to him that that very desirable consummation is not so easily effected; though I am sure, if Conscience ever troubled Tosey, she must have done it out of revenge for this attempt to limit her sphere of action, and not in the way of duty.

The most touching speech (save one) that I can call to mind from this child’s tongue was on the occasion of his nurse, Elizabeth,

leaving our service to better herself (as she sanguinely expected) by matrimony. It was arranged beforehand that no actual "Good-bye" should take place, lest it should harrow the child's feelings, and the attendant that was to succeed her had for some time been living in the house, in order to accommodate herself to the children's ways. But when the evening arrived on which his Elizabeth was not to return, an explanation of some sort became unavoidable. It was broken to him that for that night the new hand was to put him to bed. "What!" said Tosey, "that strange 'ooman? Nedder, nedder!"

In vain it was urged that the arrangement should be only temporary. Tosey was quite unappeasable, and I received a request to come upstairs in person to the nursery. There I found him, arrayed in his tiny great-coat, and his little hat, evidently bent on a night-journey. It was about the time in winter that he had first come to us, and a thick fog reigned out of doors, yet he was

determined to find his Elizabeth. "Da-da," said he, "I must go to my dear Lizzy. Only tell me this: shall I turn to the right hand, or shall I turn to the left, when I get out at the door?"

Conceive the determination of that small child, and picture him, in the wild waste of wintry London, looking for his lost friend, whom he only knew by her Christian-name, shortened for love and euphony. I confess the spectacle almost upset me (as for my wife, she was crying worse than he was), and if I could have inveigled Elizabeth from the arms of her bridegroom, I am afraid I should have done it. As it was, Rosey's tender eloquence, combined with a judicious application of "pigs" of oranges, persuaded him to retire to rest; and ten days afterwards, when his Lizzy came to see him, she was half broken-hearted to see how easily he had transferred his affections to her substitute. "I love all peepy"

(people) was Tosey's boast, "and all peepy loves me."

And certainly everybody did love him who had the privilege of his intimate acquaintance: his very foibles assumed such a pleasant guise, that they were attractive; and even his childish selfishness had a humour about it which half redeemed the fault. It was necessary to impress upon him that he was always to give way to ladies, and so he did (for he was obedience itself), but it went against the grain; with Rosey especially, who was for giving way to *him* in everything, he found it difficult to practise these Chesterfield manners. On one occasion, the two children amused themselves by changing clothes: Rosey became a shy, retiring boy of heavenly loveliness; and Tosey, a brilliant girl, not without a dash of that "*beauté du diable*" which is ascribed to some of the softer sex. They hurried into our room to admire themselves in the

pier-glass, and Tosey pushed Rosey aside with this remark: "Ladies first, if you please, dear." He was at that time, so far as we could calculate, about five years old; as clever as John Stuart Mill at the same age, if not so learned, and with fifty times the fun of that philosopher at any period of his unnatural life.

Rosey was not quite so intelligent, though full of practical good sense, guided by an exquisite tenderness. "I do not understand—I love," might have been her motto. In all those questions of theology and philosophy which Tosey tackled as readily as a navvy a wheel-barrow, her curiosity was tempered with humility. It was but rarely, and only when we two were quite alone, that she would ask to have a doubt resolved.

"God could put my head on again, if it tumbled off, could he not, Da-da?"

"Certainly, my dear," said I; then added, by way of rebuke for her absurdity, "though

that might not be done probably in the way you imagine."

"Ah, I see. He could do it with blood, I suppose, while man could only do it with *glue*."

On one occasion, when we were about to be driven out of our London house by the painters and cleansers, and there had been, as usual, much domestic debate about our seaside plans, Rosey inquired confidentially: "Where do the people in heaven go to, Da-da, when *that* is being white-washed?"

Sometimes the child would administer an unconscious reproof. "I heard you say, Da-da, that Mr. Jones was a brute, the other day; how could *that* be, when he is a man?"

Rosey's conversations and remarks were of course very ridiculous, but to *me* at least I confess they were infinitely better than amusing. To Rosey and Tosey I was the interpreter of nature, and the high-priest

of the mysteries of life, and they came to me to unravel all the tangled skein. The position was embarrassing and full of responsibility, but my occupation of it endeared them to me more than words can tell. To feel that they were dependent upon me for everything, and so confident of the best being done for them that could be done by word and deed, was to strengthen the claim they had upon my love by fifty-fold. They had changed all the ways of home for my wife and me, and given it light and colour. The patter of their little feet above our heads, their childish glee and chatter, made music where before had been a brooding silence. They made the cheerful morning brighter by their presence; the livelong day more teemed with life because of them; the evening, when we had seen them in their beds and kissed their eyelids, was more full of calm content. To have said we were rewarded for having taken pity upon them in their friendliness and

desertion, would have been to say little indeed. They had taken pity upon *us*, rather; enlivened our solitude, and dowered us with undreamt-of joys.

After a few months, the fear of their father coming to claim his own faded clean away from our fond hearts, and left them free for those two children's names; and they will be found engraved there when we are dead.

Only at times, as a secret writing is brought out on a sudden by the fire, the terror of such a blow would be evoked for a brief space, to fade away again like the effects of a nightmare.

It was just three years after the children had come to us, that Tosey began to exhibit certain signs of delicacy; there was nothing very wrong with him, nor could the ailment be identified with any particular disease, but the doctor said he "wanted care." Heaven knows, care was taken of him, but yet he didn't seem to mend. We kept him

close indoors that winter weather, but sorely against his will ; he was up at the window half the day, looking out upon the falling snow and the white world that lay all around us. One day some men came by with the usual cry : “ We are all froze out,” and Tosey was lavish with his pence as usual. “ It must be worse to be frozen *out*,” he observed, “ than to be frozen *in*, as I am ;” and then, after a long pause : “ If the men can’t dig because the ground is so hard, how will they dig my grave, Mum-mum, when I come to die ?”

His words, I could see, went through my poor wife’s heart, and her only answer was to strain him to her bosom, as though death itself were already about to snatch him from her. At the same moment, the door was softly opened, and Rosey slipped out of the room. I followed her, but paused at her chamber door, for I could hear her crying as though her little heart would break, and, alas ! I had no comfort for her ! It was evident that she

had wished not to distress us by the sight of that grief, of which Tosey's simple speech had opened the flood-gates. The fear of losing him had been, I felt sure, in her inmost thoughts for weeks, as it had also been in ours, though we had not dared to speak of it; but it had been intermittent; henceforth the shadow was upon us from that hour. Not that Tosey grew greatly worse, or that the doctor took a more serious view of his case; but our presentiment of woe was stronger than our faith in science. As the child's strength and spirits failed him—which they did very gradually, though to our loving eyes not imperceptibly—his affections appeared to grow stronger for us all; but they concentrated themselves upon his beloved Rosey.

“It almost seems,” whispered my wife, “as though he feels that he is about to leave her, and grudges every moment they spend apart.”

Perhaps it was so; Heaven only knew;

but in my heart was a terror too great for utterance; a fear that those two might *not* be parted, but that Rosey's gentle spirit might take its flight with his. It seemed to me that the girl could never outlive her brother—that they were flowers upon a single stem. The doctor, to whom I secretly communicated this apprehension, treated it with scorn: the girl was delicate, he said, but there was no organic disease, such as he had by this time begun to suspect in the boy's case. The affections of children, however powerful, were evanescent; and I should one day give Rosey away with my own hands as the bride of some honest young fellow. Heaven knows that I tried hard to believe him.

It was spring-time, and Tosey was still with us, and could even go out of doors in an open carriage; but he had to be lifted in and out—a burden that grew lighter every day. It was piteous to see him failing and fading, when every tree was putting forth its

leaf, and every plant its blossom. I never smell the May-flowers now, nor see their snowy masses, without recalling Tosey's delight in them upon that day—the last in which he ever saw them. Once, as he passed a field so thick with buttercups that it looked like a veritable Field of the Cloth of Gold, he asked to get out and go among them; and when we reminded him of his weakness, he answered contentedly: “All right”—and what a soft and tender phrase he made of that “All right!” “It wouldn't be much good, for, you see, I *should be afraid to put my foot upon them.*” Tosey did not know that the poet had written—

A lover would not tread
A cowslip on the head,
Though he should dance from eve to peep of day,

but spoke from a heart all gentleness and pity. It could be said of him, as it can be said of few children, “He never hurt a fly;”

and yet what a pang he gave us, more sharp, and bitter, and lasting than any sword-thrust, when he whispered that night, as we laid him in his cot: "I don't think I shall ever play about in my little nursery again."

He never did; he left us within that week, and he took Rosey with him. It was not to be expected—I never did expect it—that she who had come from heaven to be his guardian angel upon earth, should remain here when her mission had been accomplished. We had been up all night with him, but towards morning he had fallen asleep, and we had left him with his nurse and Rosey. If he moved, if he sighed, if he breathed a deeper breath than usual, that child would spring noiselessly out of bed, and be at his side in an instant. The nurse was watchful too, after her kind, but it is Love alone that has the fine ear. What gentle shock dissolved soul from body, we know not—perhaps he did but *lip* his sister's name; but Rosey heard it. We found them in the early

morning locked in one another's arms, both dead. *Their Father had come for them at last.*

So ended the one romance of our unromantic home; but the memory of it abides with us both, and will ever do so. It was never cleared up in any way. Who Dodo was, or where those darlings came from, we still know not. We only know—and for certain—where they are gone to. We do not regret that our Christmas-box (as Nelly used to call them) was given to us, only to be taken away again so soon; we have the comfort of it even now. Moreover, we dare to think that we shall one day see them again. There will be change in us, but surely not in them. My Rosey's face will have the Light from the Presence upon it, but it will be the same face; for it was always that of an angel.

TOLD IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.

BORN TO GREATNESS.



TOLD IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.

“WHEN the ladies leave us and go to the drawing-room, what is it they talk about?” is a question that, in one form or another, has been asked of me by gentlemen friends pretty often. I need not say in vain. There was once a woman who shut herself up in a cupboard to attend a Freemasons’ meeting, but never yet has a man ventured to discover what takes place upstairs after the lady of the house has bowed to the first female guest, and the last petticoat has brushed through the dining-room doorway. The secret has been religiously kept for four thousand years and more (*much* more,

the geologists say, I believe), and yet it is said that a woman cannot keep such a thing. Hobbledchoys — neither men nor boys—have been dismissed from the dessert-table, and come up to us, it is true, while we have been at our mysteries, but I flatter myself they have not learned much of them. We have met them, as a flock of sheep opposes itself to an intruding puppy-dog, with grave faces and silence, and the spy has had nothing to report to his employers. They have invented stories about us, of course. I remember one of how a very strong-minded lady once entertained us with such very strong-minded anecdotes that the hostess rose (like a man) and said, “I really think we had better join *the gentlemen*.” But that is evidently a gentleman’s story. No woman has yet proved so false to her sex that when she has married, and “become one with her husband” (as *he* thinks, poor creature!) she has disclosed to him the history of that half hour when the males are sipping their wine

together, and talking, let us in charity suppose, of the vintages, and we are above-stairs holding solemn conclave among ourselves.

To be branded as a traitress throughout all time is a punishment which few would voluntarily incur, even for much gold; and, for my part, neither my poverty nor my will would consent to the act which I have in contemplation, had not my sex—the “gentler sex,” as some still call it—in their short-sighted arrogance and insolent folly, outlawed me already. You shake your head, my Public; you rub your nose; you are thinking to yourself that this is a sort of writer you had not bargained for; you are about to decline to read the revelation of this ineligible “young person” with thanks, as being no better than she should be. Pause, my dear Public, for you are on the verge of a most frightful error. I have done nothing of which I need be ashamed—nothing which in this free and noble country ought

to be to my discredit. I am driven from the society of my own sex because I have become what they persist in calling a Medical Man ! With the general question of Woman's Rights in this country I am not about to trouble you, and far less with my own private wrongs ; but since I am, forsooth, "unsexed" through having learned the art of healing, and "a disgrace to womankind" for having earned my diploma, I accept the position in which the cruelty of my sisters has placed me. I make no bones (to use an expression borrowed from my new profession) about revealing the secrets of a society from which I have been so unhandsomely expelled.

I can easily imagine the terror which in some female breasts these words will inspire ; and, indeed, if I were capable of being actuated by feelings of revenge, some might well tremble. But my nature, if (as it is sneeringly entitled) masculine, is mild. It is merely my intention to rescue from the

oblivion which would without doubt have otherwise overtaken them certain noteworthy and characteristic "after-dinner stories," told not as usual in an atmosphere of wine and walnuts (and perhaps even cigars), but of cedar and satin-wood, and all that is fanciful and feminine in the ladies' chamber—the withdrawing-room. It seems only reasonable, while I am compelled to sit with folded hands waiting for the patients that perhaps may never come, to pass that time of enforced idleness (for which, too, I am in some sort indebted to the ridicule of my sex) in recalling some reminiscences of *them*. They often complain that they have nothing to talk about—though, for my part, I have not observed that that circumstance ever reduced them to silence—and they ought, therefore, to be grateful to me for providing them with a topic. They must by this time have worn thread-bare the subject of my so-called apostacy; let them now speak of my perfidy and

treason. Don't imagine that I am angry ; the study of medical science has, I am thankful to say, so balanced my mind that irritation is no longer possible with me. Vanity, prejudice, malice—all the “little-nesses,” in fact so characteristic of the female, are totally eradicated from my system. With the exception that I sometimes cross my prescriptions, and am still rather too prone to use italics, I have none of the weaknesses of the woman left. It is not because I am of the weaker sex that I confess to a slight flutter of the heart as I prepare, for the first time since the creation of the world, to lift the curtain which has hidden from the eyes and ears of man the after-dinner proceedings of his helpmate. A hundred generations of *passée* females seem to be looking down upon me from the past in indignation or remonstrance. Eve—no, our first mother had no drawing-room : she kept her husband company, after their frugal repast was finished, over his

pipe ; but all the women, *except* her : Semiramis (I believe this *was* a woman ; but if I am wrong, Mr. Publisher, please to expunge it : my historical education was no better than that of most of my sex, and the “*Materia Medica*” affords me no information)—I see Semiramis with flaming eyes and Cleopatra looking like a termagant, though it is my belief that both of them would much rather have had coffee below-stairs with the gentlemen than have sought the drawing-room at all. I see Hannah More and Mrs. Trimmer raising their mittened hands in horror at the deed I am about to do. I don’t care ; they have driven me to it with their sneers and ridicule. Why shouldn’t I be a doctor, and help poor delicate women and little children, whom I understand, and who need never feel ashamed or afraid of my ministering presence ? It is abominable of them, and shows a miserable, petty spirit, for which, if I had not acquired a perfectly-balanced mind, I should feel an

unspeakable contempt. But I will not be betrayed into a single uncharitable expression. Centuries hence, when they are all forgotten, my name will be associated with those who first burst the trammels of convention, and became benefactresses of their species; and that reflection is more than sufficient for me. Still my position is a trying one. I see Queen Elizabeth (although *she* would have liked to stop downstairs too) in her starched ruff, and with her father's furious expression in her voice, and with some very strong words of her own in her mouth, ordering me to instant execution, and Lady Jane Grey expostulating with me from the skies in her well-meaning classical way. But I don't care; they shouldn't have driven me to it.

BORN TO GREATNESS.*

THE tale of the drawing-room, which has left the strongest impression on me, arose from a conversation about servants, a subject which is very popular there. Yes, indeed, if you men imagine that religion and politics are discoursed of on the first-floor during your absence, you are excessively mistaken. Nor is one word of medical science, properly so called, ever uttered there. Women talk of their children's ailments. But I am digressing. With elderly

* The gentleman who some years ago communicated the facts of this story to the author is requested to favour him with his address.

ladies, servants is *the* topic. They sail into the drawing-room — the old ones — and at once make for the ottoman, which affords ample room for their magnificent proportions and skirts, and at once begin to compare notes together about their domestics; while the young ones (about whom I may have to speak at another time) make little coteries of their own, consisting generally but of two each, their object being to interchange “confidences,” some genuine, most of them fictitious. One or two—there has always been, as far as my experience goes, at least *one* of this class — one or two approach the table to examine the books, or any scientific instruments, such as the microscope, which may happen to lie there; but these intelligent personages are unpopular. “We are afraid we are not clever enough for *you*,” is the remark with which they are greeted by their young friends, should they be so unwise as to make advances to them. But I am again digressing.

I know my own faults, you see ; crossing my prescriptions ; italics ; digression. Where *saw* I ? For each of the confidential couples the lady of the house has a good-natured word, and a piece of good advice for the student : “ Wearing out your brain, as usual, my dear Miss Bluestocking. Why *don't* you let it rest ? ” And then she gravitates towards the ottoman, where the Great Topic is already being discussed.

“ I am sure I don't know what we shall do for servants next,” says Number One, “ they are all getting so high and mighty.”

“ This notion of educating everybody is destruction,” says Number Two. “ It makes them all dissatisfied with their places.”

“ With that position in life,” says the rector's wife, with an air of the pulpit, “ in which Providence has placed them.”

“ Just so ; and then they are so ignorant ! ” says Number Three.

“ Most shockingly ignorant,” is the una-

nimous reply, except from the hostess, who, with a dim notion that it is her place to prevent too great inconsistencies of statement, remarks, "Ignorant *or* opinionated, one or the other."

"You may say what you like," says Number Four, "but what lies at the bottom of it all is those fly-away caps. They are always setting them at somebody."

"Oh, as to that, you know," says Number One, sinking her voice, and looking round to see that the young ladies are duly engaged with their confidences or their microscope, "there is a most shocking story afloat about poor Mr. Methuselah and——"

Here all the heads on the ottoman approach one another so closely that a collection of birds and foliage, with a turban or two, like nests, is formed, and the remainder of the shocking story is related in a whisper.

"Well, I never!" "You don't say so!" "There is no fool like an old fool!" are the

observations with which the news of Mr. Methuselah's approaching "marriage beneath him" is received.

"I have only known *one* case of that description ever turn out well," observes a voice which has hitherto been unheard. It proceeds from Miss Flutter, a country cousin of the hostess, a lively, dapper little woman, who may be any age, from thirty-five to fifty. "The exception only proves the rule, you know," adds she, apologetically; "but I *have* known an instance where such a match proved a success."

The other ladies turn inquiringly towards the hostess. Is her cousin (whom they have understood to be but a poor relation) to be credited? One of them shakes her head (with an ostrich feather on it) and smiles satirically, in token that she will not believe such an outrage on common-sense, although the woman that should narrate it had ten thousand a year.

"I have often heard Cousin Jane tell the

story," says the hostess, prudently; "and it is certainly a very curious one."

"I should like to hear it," says Lady Stalkingham, the only titled person present, and whose wish is law. Whereupon followed Cousin Jane's story:

"At Bath, where I used to live, good servants were as hard to procure as they are here in London. When you did happen to get one you called her a 'perfect treasure,' and flouted her in your friends' faces as a model of what their servants ought to be, till in time she grew to be your mistress, and no servant at all. When you got a bad one you put up with her, for fear that in the exchange you might chance to get a worse. My own position was singularly unfortunate in this respect, since most of my neighbours kept a footman, and I had not even a page-boy; and you all know what an objection young persons in service have to coming to a place where there is no gentleman's society. Under these unpleasant

circumstances, I once found myself for six weeks without a parlour-maid. It is a more difficult situation to get filled than my cousin here, with her butler and footman, has any idea of; for a young woman must have strength to bring up the dinner-tray from the kitchen, and dexterity to lay the cloth and wait, and a good address when answering the door. I once lost my best china dinner-service (all but the butter-boat) through a slip on the stairs, and my best friend through a slap on the face, which Matilda Jane, being in liquor, administered to her in the hall. After which it was that the interregnum of which I have spoken took place. I really didn't dare advertise for another parlour-maid, lest I should get that dreadful young woman's counterpart, but made my want known to my acquaintances, and waited till I should hear of some one eligible through them. And at last I did so. The husband of an old school friend of mine being appointed to a colonial

bishopric, she wrote to me to say that their establishment in England was to be broken up, and that one of the pieces was a 'perfect treasure' of a parlour-maid. She had tried to prevail upon the girl to accompany her to the Caribbean Islands, which were situated in her husband's see; but Emily had heard some foolish stories about cannibalism, and preferred to remain in England, for which one could hardly blame her. 'I have no fault whatever to find with Emily Seton,' wrote my friend, 'except that she is absurdly afraid of being like Hood's school-fellow, "scraped to death with oyster-shells among the Caribbees."' My friend's husband *was* afterwards killed and eaten alive, and the whole family 'potted,' by-the-by, though that is neither here nor there, and I only mention it as an incidental proof of Emily's sagacity.

"Let me attempt to describe to you that admirable young woman. She had beautiful brown hair, always kept in perfect

order, but without the least attempt to imitate her betters by the addition of frisettes or chignons; her eyes were brown also, and very soft and pleasing; her features, though far from regular, were well shaped; and her expression bright and intelligent. Her dress, which would, of course, have been *the* index of her character, told nothing, because she was in mourning.

“ ‘I am afraid you have been in trouble, Emily Seton,’ said I, at our first meeting.

“ ‘Yes, madam, I have had the misfortune to lose a friend,’ replied she.

“ And I asked no more questions about it. By her making use of the word ‘friend,’ I naturally understood her to mean her lover, and though I pitied her, poor soul, I could not help congratulating myself on the circumstance; for when such a misfortune happens, one is generally certain of retaining even a good-looking young person’s services—so far, that is, as mankind are concerned—

for six months or so at least. In these days one can scarcely hope for more. However, Emily remained with me much longer than that, and never once put off her mourning, whether because black wears well, or because she knew that it became her, you shall judge for yourselves when you have heard all.

“To all my questions she gave the most satisfactory replies, and I was about to signify that our interview was at an end, when, with a little hesitation, she observed, ‘By-the-by, madam, I suppose Mrs. Quiverfull gave you to understand about my hour to myself?’

“‘Your hour to yourself? What do you mean, my good girl? Mrs. Quiverfull never said a word about it!’

“‘She always allowed it to me, ma’am: one hour, in the middle of the day—or at all events by daylight—to *myself*; that is absolutely indispensable.’

“‘I never heard of such a singular pro-

position, Emily Seton,' was my reply. 'You will have your Sunday out, of course.'

" 'I don't care at all about *that*, ma'am, thank you,' interrupted she. 'I don't wish to go out on Sundays; but one hour every day to myself is what I must have.'

" 'Oh, I see,' thought I; 'this is a Methodist. She won't go out on Sunday, which is a self-abnegation I have never known in one of her class; and she wants an hour a day for prayer and meditation. She must, indeed, be a perfect treasure, for Mrs. Quiverfull, with her High-Church notions, to have kept such a girl in her service.'

" 'Well, Emily Seton,' said I, 'this is an arrangement which I had not expected, and will certainly be very inconvenient, but nevertheless you shall have your hour.'

" 'As I had done without a parlour-maid for the whole day for six weeks, I could surely do without one, was my reflection, for a single hour; and then she was in all other respects so exceedingly suitable. My

only fear was that, being a Methodist, I should not keep her for six months certain, because of the men. I need not, however, have disturbed myself with any such apprehensions. So far from encouraging the other sex, she kept them at a great distance, and when I gave my little dinner-parties—which, after six weeks of inaction, during which my friends had been very hospitable, it became necessary for me to do—she steadily refused all offers of male assistance at the table. She begged me neither to ask my guests to bring their footmen nor to hire our green-grocer, though a very handy man, and whom you would never know from a regular butler except for his thumbs coming through his Berlin gloves. She could wait on half-a-dozen persons *well*, she said, and with the housemaid's help—whom, by-the-by, she taught so excellently that, after Emily's departure, she took her place—even on eight, which was the largest number that my dining-room would accommodate. No 'cousin' ever

called to see Emily Seton; nor did she ever ask for a day's holiday, nor for those few hours in the evening 'to visit an aged relative,' with which touching request we are all of us so familiar. She was a favourite in the household, though she kept herself *to* herself in an unusual degree: she never gossiped; never retailed below-stairs the conversation she had heard above, and this was the more singular since not a word and scarcely a look escaped her. Her eyes, her ears, were everywhere, so that no one had to ask for anything to drink or eat. As to talk upon general subjects, I knew that nothing was lost upon her, because she would guide herself both with respect to myself and others by any hint let fall respecting attendance or service, though by no means addressed to or even intended for herself. In a word, then, Emily Seton would have been just perfection as a parlour-maid but for that inconvenient stipulation of hers—the one hour to herself, from three till

four—which she never waived, no matter what the stress upon her services, nor intermitted for a single day. At three precisely, immediately after the kitchen dinner, she went up to her own room and *locked* the door, and at four precisely she came out again and resumed her business as if there had been no intermission of it. Visitors might call in the meanwhile, or her bell might be rung by some guest staying in the house, but they did not in the least disturb this irrevocable arrangement. She could not be a Methodist, because she went to church, did not mind bringing up hot dinners on a Sunday, and took in one of Mr. Dickens's novels (as I was told by the cook) in monthly parts; and what she did with herself during that mysterious hour was a question that was *wearing my heart out*."

"I should rather think it was," said all the ladies on the ottoman but two.

"I think *I* can guess what was her occu-

pation," said Lady Stalkingham, severely. "Your piece of perfection kept a bottle of spirits in her bed-room."

"Lor' bless you, my lady, nothing of the kind; my Emily hated the very smell of them."

"No, no; it was dress," said the rector's wife, "not drink. Your perfect treasure was doing her beautiful hair, and arranging her spotless cuffs and collar against the time when her 'Mr. Right' should come."

"Both wrong," answered Miss Flutter, curtly, a little put out, I think, by these commonplace elucidations of a mystery which had baffled her for so many months; "you would never guess it if you guessed from now till doomsday. The girl was under my own roof, remember—under my own eye—and all the household were equally curious to get at her secret. Drink and dress, of course, occurred to us, but each of those would have had its results: she was as grave and sober after her hour's retirement as before,

and there was not the least alteration in her attire.

For my part, I began to think that the poor girl was a poetess, or something queer of that sort; but when I taxed her with writing verses she only replied, with her quiet smile, ‘Indeed, ma’am, I wish I could,’ which, although not a sensible rejoinder, was so far satisfactory, that it showed she didn’t.

“Well, ladies, I don’t mind owning to you, since we are all of the same sex here, that my excessive curiosity at last got the better of my feelings as a gentlewoman. I was resolved at all hazards to get to the bottom of this mystery, and——”

“You looked through the key-hole, of course!” exclaimed Lady Stalkingham, greatly excited.

“I *tried* to look through the key-hole, your ladyship, but she had stopped it up. I listened outside the door, and heard voices talking.”

“Ah, *that* was it, was it?” said the rector’s wife. “Well, to tell you the truth, I suspected it from the first.”

“But it was nothing of the kind, madam,” continued Miss Flutter, drily. “Emily Seton was incapable of an impropriety, and both the voices were her own. Unhappily, from the same cause that prevented my seeing what she was at, I was unable to catch what she said, and my curiosity was whetted to such a pitch that I determined upon a course of action which I blush to relate. There was a cupboard in the room.”

“And you hid there!” ejaculated the rector’s wife. “Well, it was very natural.”

“It was absolutely necessary, madam; if I had not done so I should have had brain-fever. Yes; I went softly upstairs to the attics at two-forty-five and hid myself in Emily’s cupboard, and at three o’clock she came into her room as usual and locked the door.

“By that time I was thoroughly ashamed

of myself. If she had opened the cupboard she might, I am sure, have knocked me down with a feather, and I felt that I deserved to be knocked down with something much harder. But still, since I *was* there, it was no use to shut my eyes; and I stared through a crack in the panel at the proceedings I am about to relate as hard as I could stare.

“In the first place she took down her bonnet and shawl, and put them on before the looking-glass with the greatest care. Then she drew on her gloves, and took up a parasol and a little church-service I had given her, and began to walk slowly round the room. Of course I then thought she was mad—some sort of religious fanatic, that always prayed with a bonnet and shawl on—and you may conceive my terror when she knocked at the cupboard door with her parasol, and inquired whether *I* was at home there. Yes: she asked, just as a lady asks of a footman, ‘Is Miss Flutter at home?’ and I felt my heart in my mouth and my

brains nowhere as she did so. To my intense relief, however, she did not open the door, but sat down just outside (imagine my feelings!) and began to carry on a conversation with me—only she did it all herself—in the following fashion :

“ ‘What lovely weather we have been having lately, Miss Flutter!’ ”

“ ‘Yes, indeed; it makes me quite long for the country. When are you going out of town?’ ”

“ ‘Then, after a pause, ‘The Larkinses’ (these were friends of mine) ‘are going to Brighton, I hear. Where do you think of spending the autumn?’ ”

“ ‘At Torquay, if I can get reasonable lodgings. Everything is so very dear there, however. What a beautiful shawl you have! Is it Indian?’ ”

“ ‘Yes; it was a present from dear old General Mulligatawny,’ &c., &c.

“ ‘It was not until she had been going on like this for some time that I perceived

that she was playing, like a child, at morning calls, and that the church-service represented a card-case. Presently, much to my joy, she left my cupboard, and knocked at other imaginary doors, paying at each a most fashionable visit of some duration. Then began a still more singular proceeding. She dragged out her large box into the middle of the room, and placed upon it two towels very smoothly; upon this she put her brush and comb and tooth-brush, and a number of other little articles, which, as I guessed, represented knives and forks, arranged her two chairs round this improvised table, and then sat down to entertain an imaginary dinner-party. I had a little recovered myself by this time, and was better able to appreciate the merits of this second performance. She imitated the conversation of myself as hostess, and that of various friends of mine as guests, to admiration, dilated upon the opera and the theatres, showed herself conversant with the movements of the Court,

and even rallied our excellent doctor (one of the best in Bath) upon his opinions, which I have always told him are revolutionary. She pressed upon all their favourite dishes, and at last, when this Barmecide feast had come to an end, she bowed to an invisible lady, and then rose, no doubt to retire to the drawing-room. Her hour was up, thank goodness! and it was evident that this Cinderella of the attic was about to descend from these imaginary festivities and fashionable dreams to her parlour-maid's work again. She hung up her bonnet and shawl, put back the towels, and with just one look at the glass—to see, I suppose, that all her airs and graces had disappeared—she left the room and tripped downstairs.”

“She was mad, of course,” said Lady Stalkingham. “How lucky it was you found her out before she smothered you all in your beds.”

“So I thought at the time, your ladyship.

I dared not tell her that I had stooped to the meanness of having played the spy upon her, nor could I venture to keep so eccentric a young person in my house. So upon the plea of the great inconvenience of that hour to herself, which I was very sure she would not give up, we parted. I was very sorry to lose her, and so were her fellow-servants; and I had afterward reason to think that a bee in the bonnet is not so bad in a parlour-maid as cherry-coloured ribbons. However, as I say, she left me, and I did not see her again for the next five years, when the circumstance occurred wherein lies the gist of my story.

“I had changed my residence from Bath to Brighton, and was sitting one summer afternoon in my little balcony, when an open carriage drawn by two beautiful ponies, and driven by a handsomely-dressed lady, stopped at my door. I was sure that there was some mistake, since I knew nobody who possessed so well-appointed a vehicle, and was greatly

surprised when, on the door being answered, the visitor, instead of driving away, got out and followed my servant, bearing a card with 'Mrs. Leslie' engraved upon it, into the drawing-room. I took the card, of course, but, 'Really,' said I, 'I think there is some misapprehension—'

" 'Not at all,' said the lady, smiling; 'I know you very well, madam, and you knew me when my name was Emily Seton.'

"It was indeed my old parlour-maid, although I should never have guessed it, so very much is there in altered attire and the confidence that is begotten by prosperous circumstances.

" 'You were once very kind to me, Miss Flutter,' said she, tenderly, 'and I always wished to thank you for it; and, moreover, I owe you an explanation for what must have seemed to you very objectless and obstinate behaviour on my part while in your service.'

"She little knew why I coloured up and

told her that that was not necessary (for indeed it wasn't), and that I entertained nothing but the kindest sentiments with respect to her, and warm approval of her conduct. She insisted on telling me the whole story, which I knew so well, of how she had occupied that hour to herself for which she stickled so peremptorily. 'And now,' said she, when that recital was finished, '*I will tell you why I did so.* I had always a conviction that I was "born to greatness;" not doomed, at all events, to be a mere servant-maid all my life; and therefore I never lost an opportunity for learning the part of gentlewoman, which I should one day have to play. It would be a great thing for me, I reasoned, if the gentleman who was to make me his wife should have no cause to be ashamed of me as to my behaviour in society, and therefore I cultivated my manners by observing those of my betters with whom I came in contact, and by imitating them to the best of my ability. I paid calls up

in my poor attic as I saw your visitors did below-stairs, and practised the hostess after your excellent model, in readiness for the day, which at length arrived, when I should have to do such things in reality and upon my own account.'

" 'And how *did* the day arrive, my dear Mrs. Leslie?' inquired I, with unfeigned interest.

" 'Well, madam, I left your service, as you remember, for that of an invalid lady, whose good opinion I was fortunate enough to obtain. From her lady's-maid I grew to be her "companion." My manners, my reading—every little advantage I had acquired, in fact—became of use to me in that position; though, so far as dear Charles is concerned'—here she dropped her long black eyelashes, and really looked quite beautiful—'I dare to believe that he loves me for myself alone.'

" 'But who *is* dear Charles?' inquired I.

" 'Oh, please, ma'am, I forgot,' said Emily, falling inadvertently into her old manner

with me. 'He was my mistress's nephew, to whom she left all her property, and he has done me the honour to make me his wife.'

"I was afterwards introduced to her husband," continued Miss Flutter, "and found them a very happy pair. So, though what you were saying, my lady, is doubtless true, about young persons who marry above their sphere, this case was an exception."

"So far as it went, it was, Miss Flutter; but you don't know how it has ended."

"Ah! there's where it is, Lady Stalkingham," assented the rector's wife, with a glance in which significance may have been said to culminate: "what is bred in the basement is sooner or later sure to come out in the first-floor."

MISS TWITTER'S CONSPIRACY.

MISS TWITTER'S CONSPIRACY.

YEARS ago I had a young person in my service called Annabel Brown. The Brown was not, of course, surprising in a parlour-maid, but the Annabel was ; and the more so when the cook made Hannibal of it, who, I need not remark, was a gentleman and a general. For my part, I could not encourage such a name at all in one in her position, but called her plain "Annie," with which she was quite content. She was an orphan ; but I had known both her parents, and very honest, good folks they were, with plenty of common-sense too, so that it could not have been they, but her "godfather and

godmothers in her baptism," as the Service says, who gave her such an outlandish name—for Christian I can't call it. She was a modest girl, who, if she had a fault in dress, was given to extreme simplicity; indeed, some of my visitors used to say: "So you have got a Quakeress, I see;" which was, of course, ridiculous; for though one does not want one's servants to be chatter-boxes, one likes one's questions answered by something more than "Yes" or "No," to which, I believe, the vocabulary of the Friends is limited. Moreover, though I am not a great lady, nor anything like it, it was not likely I should permit my parlour-maid to "thou" and "thee" me, and far less my guests. However, what with the meekness of her manners and the simplicity of her attire, Annabel Brown might have sat for Mrs. Fry, supposing that good lady to have ever been eighteen and a beauty. Annie had black hair, very silken and plentiful; large black eyes like those of a gazelle;

and a soft, rather alarmed expression of face, which, if it did not suggest modesty, was the most hypocritical mask that ever woman wore. Her movements were quick, but noiseless; and altogether she reminded one of a mouse. Like a mouse, however, she was not as regards purloining, even so much as a rind of cheese. I could have trusted her with untold gold; and when I had a new bonnet or other piece of finery, I felt as certain that Annabel Brown would never try them on even, to see how she looked in my cheval-glass, as though I had kept them under lock and key. Finally, and above all, she had no Followers; or, at all events, they followed her at such a distance that they never came within view of my windows, and I have a pretty long sight for such gentry.

I need not say that Annie was a constant church-goer, and as sure as Sunday came round, always went "to hear the Word" (that was her phrase, though she was by

no means a canter) twice a day, whether it was wet or fine. In the evenings she never went out, not even on week-days, which itself spoke volumes in her praise. She had no friends in town, she said, in explanation of this phenomenon. She was the only maid I ever had who never asked leave to pass an evening with her "friends" or "cousins." Well, being such a pattern of propriety, you may imagine my astonishment on seeing her come home from church one day accompanied by a young man, who left her at the front door (my area-gate is always locked on Sunday) with a bow that would not have disgraced Lord Chesterfield.

Though a fine morning, it had turned out wet, and I noticed, with no little distress of mind, that the umbrella which he was holding over her with much apparent solicitude was a handsome silk one; the man himself, too, had an alarmingly genteel appearance. I made sure that Annie would explain this unprecedented circumstance with-

out any inquiry on my part; and when some hours passed by without her doing so, the matter appeared to me all the graver.

Accordingly, at night, when she was assisting me in my room, I broached the subject myself.

"Annie," said I, "I was very much surprised to see you come home from church this morning accompanied by a stranger. How did that happen?"

"Well, ma'am, it was very wet," returned she (with a simplicity that would have quite disarmed me, even if I had entertained any indignation against her, which I did not; I only felt angry with *the man*); "and as I had no umbrella, the gentleman, who was at church himself, kindly offered to see me home."

"Annie," said I solemnly, "do not imagine that men—and especially *gentlemen*—only go to church as you do, to say their prayers. I once heard a great preacher, Mr. Spurgeon, divide 'church-goers' into a

number of classes, some of which were of a very unsatisfactory sort. Among others there was the 'umbrella Christian,' as he termed it: the man who goes into a church merely to save his hat, or get out of the rain."

"But, please, ma'am, this gentleman *had* an umbrella," observed Annabel Brown.

I thought it rather pert, and very unlike herself, that she should argue with me on this matter; but still, I was determined not to lose my temper.

"In this particular case, that may have been so," said I; "but he might have gone to church with a wrong motive, for all that. To my eyes he did not look a suitable person for a young woman in your position to be walking with. He left you at the front door, and he may have been mistaken as to your condition in life. Did you inform him of it?"

"No, ma'am."

Annabel Brown was certainly too

Quakerish ; any other girl would have seen with half an eye that I was really solicitous (for her own sake) to know what the man *had* said to her ; yet all that I could get out of Annie was : “ No, ma’am.” It was not treating me, I thought, with the confidence that my conduct towards her had merited. She might have been more open—like that silk umbrella.

Next Sunday was a fine one, and yet, if you will believe me, Annie came home again escorted by that very man ! I had gone to church myself, and returned, as usual, some minutes after her ; but cook informed me—with rather a malicious grin, I thought—that such had really been the case.

I had not put the question ; I had merely asked whether Annie had come in, feeling pretty sure, however, that she had, and was gone upstairs to take off her things, which was the case.

“ Oh yes, ma’am, she ’ave come. I only

wonder her friend didn't come in with her; he seemed so very much attached."

"What friend?" asked I, with assumed indifference.

"Oh, pray, ma'am, don't ask me; Hannibal, I know, is such a pattern. Otherwise, I *should* have said as 'ow he was a follower."

"And what sort of a man was he, cook?"

"Oh, quite the gentleman to *look at*; fine feathers makes fine birds to them as can see no further;" and cook looked as if she could see a great deal further, and amongst other things the house robbed, and her mistress's throat cut, in no distant perspective.

But I did not fear for anything, except upon Annie's account, and resolved at once to give her a good "talking to."

"Now, my good girl," said I, having summoned her into the drawing-room, "this matter must be put a stop to at once. I

will not have that man come to this house again. Don't say 'What man?' because you know who I mean perfectly well. I mean the umbrella-man."

"Please, ma'am, he had no umbrella to-day."

She was so simple, that I felt quite ashamed of being angry with her.

"Umbrella or not," said I, "he shall not come here. A man without a name—and with much too good an address—it is perfectly scandalous."

"Please, ma'am, his name is Trevelyan."

"Then, that is much too good for *you*," answered I. "You have a nice manner and appearance of your own, and they have evidently deceived him; and no good can come of such a misunderstanding to either of you. Do you understand me?"

"Mr. Trevelyan knows, ma'am, that I am but a servant," observed Annabel gently, and with a little blush.

"Then the more shame for him," said

I sharply. "Mind, from this moment, you never walk with him again, or you leave my service."

Annabel Brown lowered her head in respectful assent; she would have said: "Yes, ma'am," if she could, but the tears were falling fast down her pretty cheeks. I was very sorry for her, but I felt sure that I was doing my duty by her, and did not relent.

The next Sunday she came home alone. She had been very depressed throughout the week, but going to church seemed to have done her good, for she looked much more cheerful. My impression was that she had seen him, and got rid of him; and in doing so, had discovered the wisdom of such a proceeding. He had shown his hand—with the false cards in it—and she knew him for a cheat and a deceiver, and was glad to have escaped tolerably heart-whole.

She was not so much to be pitied, how-

ever, after all, my dear friends, as you shall soon hear; so please to reserve your compassion for the person who really suffered.

Mr. Trevelyan at once proceeded to transfer his attentions to *me*.

The very next morning, Annie, looking rather white, but quiet as usual, brought up a card into the drawing-room. "This gentleman wishes to see you for a few minutes, if you are disengaged, ma'am."

"Mr. Arthur Trevelyan!" exclaimed I, reading the printed name; "why, that's never *your* Mr. Trevelyan?"

She was about to say: "Yes, ma'am," but putting on what was for her a bold face, answered: "Well, I hope he will be mine, ma'am."

The next moment, he was in the room, and Annie had shut the door, leaving me alone with this Don Giovanni. I am bound to say he was a very good-looking, gentlemanly person, and with anything but an impudent air.

“I have ventured to call upon you, madam, with relation to Annabel Brown, who is, I believe, at present your parlour-maid.”

“Well, sir,” said I, very stiff and formal.

“I thought it would be only courteous to let you know that she would be leaving you, probably before the month is up, in order to become my wife. If, as she says, you forbid us to meet, I shall take her even earlier, as I find it impossible to exist without her society—at all events on Sundays.”

“Take her earlier—make her your wife!” reiterated I: “this is quite incomprehensible to me, sir. Why, you have not seen her half-a-dozen times!”

“Nevertheless, madam, it is my intention to marry her, and that at once. She is of age, she tells me, and there is nothing to prevent it.”

“But there is surely a great difference of social position, Mr. Trevelyan. You have

the air and manners of a gentleman; while *she*——”

“Forgive me, madam, for interrupting you, but I am sure you are yourself too much a *gentlewoman* to say anything derogatory of the person I have selected for my bride.”

He quite took my breath away, he was at once so proud and so polite.

“I am twenty-six years of age, madam,” he went on, “and I know my own mind, and have an independent fortune. There is no sort of use in opposing our engagement, even if your kind heart would permit you to do so. The chief object of my calling upon you was indeed to request a personal favour of you in connection with our approaching nuptials. Annabel tells me that she has neither father nor mother, nor indeed any friend in London except yourself.”

“That certainly was my belief,” said I, “until lately.”

Mr. Trevelyan only smiled at this significant reply.

"Well, madam, this being so, and you having reason, I believe, to be satisfied with Annabel as to her moral qualities, I come to ask of you the great favour of your giving her away at the altar."

"I give Annie away! and to *you*, a perfect stranger! Never!"

"My dear madam, I honour your scruples," returned the young man with a low bow (and I must say, for grace of manner I have seldom seen his equal); "but this is the address of my lawyer, and this of a parish clergyman in your vicinity, who will both vouch for my respectability and good family. Beyond these facts, and that I have sufficient means, independent of my profession, to support a wife, I don't feel called upon to speak."

Mr. Trevelyan seemed such a very nice young man, and I had such a true regard for Annabel, that, absurd as the proposition

of my giving her away to him at first had seemed, I finally came in to it, and, about three weeks afterwards, they were married by special licence. She was not at all puffed up by her good fortune, and though he gave her a great sum for her trousseau, she expended it with her usual quiet good taste. Annabel Brown was adapted for any position in life into which she happened to be thrown, and that did not require energy or powers of conversation, in which she was certainly deficient; and out of the fifty maid-servants that I have had in my service from first to last, she was the only one of whom I could say as much.

“But how,” may perhaps be asked, “did Annabel get on after she became Mrs. Trevelyan?”

That I can't tell, but I can tell what happened to *me* in consequence, which is the terrible part of the whole story.

A stately carriage drove one day up to my door, and my new maid (a very different

one from dear Annie) came running up the stairs in a state of great excitement. "Oh mum, please, mum, there's a lord's coach at the door, and her ladyship wishes to see you."

"What's her name?" demanded I quietly; for I did not wish this grinning idiot to suppose that I was never called upon by members of the aristocracy.

"Here's her card, mum: the Lady Haliss Somethink or other."

"It is not your business to read visitors' cards," said I, stiffly. "Show Lady Alice Trevelyan up."

The similarity of name with that of Annabel's husband of course struck me at once; yet I was totally unable to conjecture her business with poor insignificant me. I was not long, however, left in doubt. A tall, bony, stiff-backed woman of about sixty years of age presently sailed into the room.

"Miss Twitter, I believe?" said she.

"The same," replied I, politely. "Will not your ladyship take a seat?"

“Certainly not,” answered she, snappishly. “I merely came to see the sort of person by whose nefarious assistance my unfortunate nephew has been entrapped into matrimony. This is the house, is it,” said she, looking round my little drawing-room in a very depreciatory way, “where this *Conspiracy* was hatched? In this vile hole you baited your trap, did you, for that innocent boy?”

“I am quite at a loss, madam, to know what you mean,” said I (though I began to guess), “except that you intend to make yourself offensive.”

“You are right there, woman,” she rejoined, acidly, “if you should never again be right in your life. It is the only consolation left to me, after the ruin of our house, to tell you to your face what I think of *you*. You are a treacherous, designing creature; you entered into a fraudulent conspiracy—— Yes, I know it’s actionable, if there’s a witness; but if you dare to come

near the bell, *I'll knock you down.* I say, you conspired to seduce the affections of my nephew, the Honourable Arthur Trevelyan, heir-presumptive to the Earl of Manilands. I don't say you did it yourself; I wish you *had*, because then the probability is that the disgrace would only have lasted for your lifetime: you employed a youthful accomplice, who passed as your maid-servant, it seems, and whose fatal charms overcame poor Arthur's scruples. It is my belief that you both ought to be hanged. Don't answer me; don't venture to speak to me, lest the sound of your hated voice should provoke me beyond all bounds! You were a witness to this atrocious marriage. I have read your foolish name in the register, you false, perjured, crafty, abominable woman! If I was not a lady born and bred, I don't know what I shouldn't call you!"

What she would have called me had she not been a lady of hereditary title, it is impossible to conjecture; she had an immense

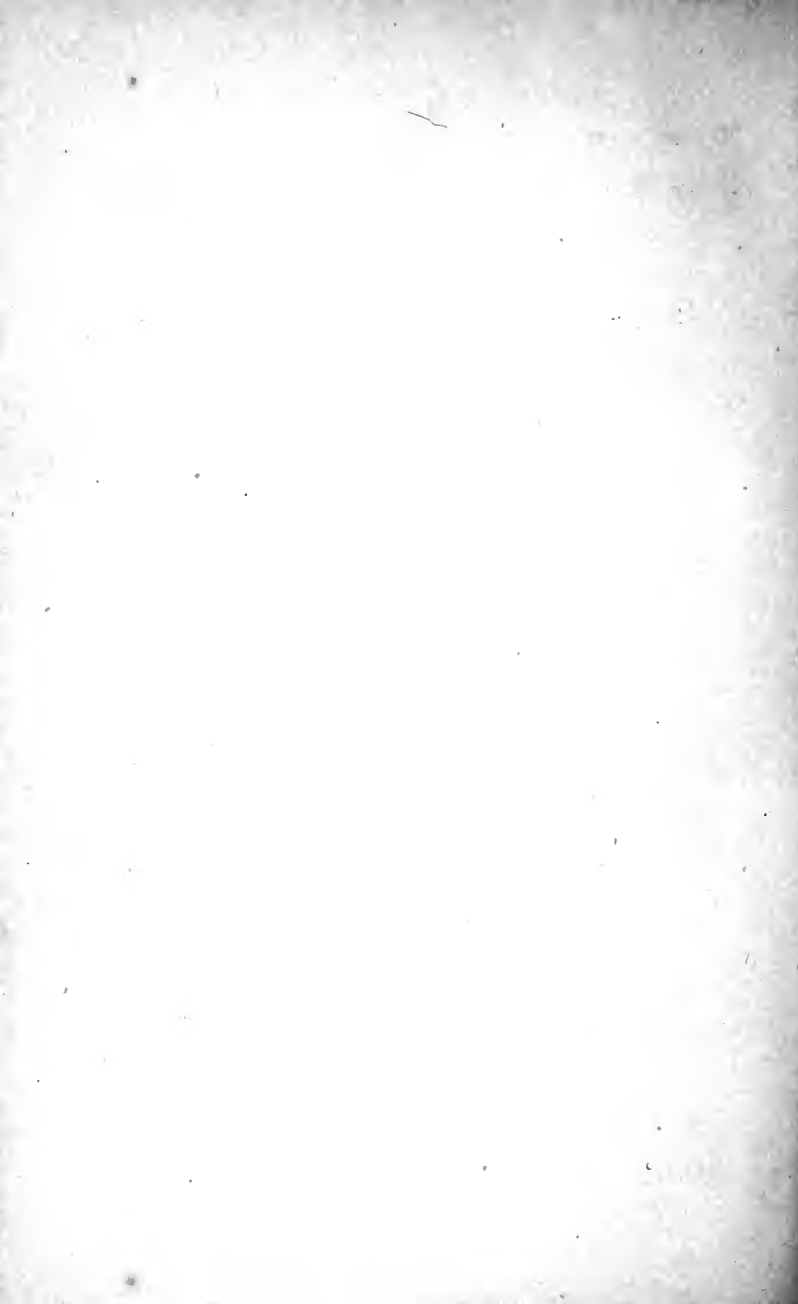
vocabulary of abuse even as it was, and she exhausted it.

“I shall come again, from time to time, and let you know what my opinion of you really is!” were her last words, which were perhaps the most terrible of all. She had nearly frightened me out of my wits as it was; and the threat of that scene being repeated, lay heavy on my soul for many a day, until my lease was out, and I took another house. Thank Heaven, I never saw her ladyship again !

Once, however, I saw Lady Manilands herself (for her husband's uncle died after a few years) going to Court in the very quietest dress in which any lady ever did go there; she gave me a bow and a smile out of the carriage window, and that was all. She never called on her old mistress. It is my impression that in her heart she was not worthy of her husband. How they got on together, I never heard; but what I have narrated is, I think, a lesson to mistresses

against encouraging servant-maids to wed above their position. I have heard it said by prudent persons: "Never give anything away;" but above all I would impress upon all spinster ladies: "Never give a parlour-maid away in marriage to the heir-presumptive of an earldom, especially if he has an aunt who is touchy about the honour of the family."

MRS. BATES' BUTLER.



MRS. BATES' BUTLER.

THERE was once a Mr. Bates, but he was only known as Mrs. Bates' husband. She was an heiress by the will of her grandfather, who had been knighted by George IV. (when His Majesty was in a state of intoxication, but the thing held for all that), and, besides, she had a will of her own. "When I have said I shall do anything, I always do it," was her boast; and she really did do it. "If you say 'Nothink,' instead of 'Nothing,' again, child, I'll throw you out of window," she once observed to a little vulgar boy whom she was teaching in the Sunday-school; and he did say "*Nothink*" again, and was thrown

out accordingly. Through this circumstance, he became a cripple, and a pensioner of the family for life ; but the important fact, that Mrs. Bates always kept her word, was maintained in its integrity. She was a liberal mistress, and not easily "put out," providing everything was done in her own way, and exactly as she liked it ; but if she once said "Go !" to any man-jack of them, he went. Sometimes, being irritated, she would say "Go !" to the whole domestic staff, and then they all went. This was not always convenient, for Mrs. Bates was hospitable, and gave frequent dinner-parties, a species of entertainment which, without cook or butler, is difficult to make a success. Still, they always came off on the day appointed. It is even said that on one occasion she apologised for the absence of Mr. Bates upon the ground of a sudden telegram from London, when he was not from home at all, but engaged in bringing up the dishes from the kitchen, and handing them to the parlour-

maid outside the dining-room. Nobody would have missed him, had she not drawn attention to his absence ; and her doing so excited suspicion in one of the company, who caught sight of him through a crack in the door. The duties of hospitality were sacred with her, and she would have sacrificed anything to them, or, at all events, much more than Mr. Bates. The poor man had indeed very little to recommend him ; so far from *his* grandfather having been knighted, he had never possessed one. So ancient was his family, said the cynics, that even his father was lost in the mists of antiquity ; and not a soul in Oxford could discover what he had been himself before he had become Mrs. Bates' husband. She resided in a beautiful house in the environs of that respectable university, and gave better dinners than the heads of houses. Without some such qualification, it would have been impossible for her, linked as she was with the unknown Bates, to have got into society at

all. The collegiate circle are exceedingly exclusive as to the people they "know." One vice-chancellor (as you may have heard) did not even know of the existence of Mr. Thackeray, and refused permission to him to read his lectures to the undergraduates, under the impression that he travelled with some sort of acrobatic entertainment. The nobility alone, and the dead languages, are reckoned worth their attention. Under such circumstances, Mr. Bates would have been held by most wives as an insurmountable barrier to their getting into the best circles; for, in addition to the disadvantage of so little being known of his ancestors, there was so much to be concealed in himself, and so much that could not be concealed. He stammered beyond anybody that I ever heard (or tried to hear), and when at last he made himself intelligible, there was often cause to regret it. For not only had he the utmost difficulty in saying anything; it was seldom the right thing, after all; it

was almost always the wrong thing. His apologies, too, were sometimes worse than his offences, since they showed a complete ignorance of the usages of society : he always knew *when* he had erred, if he happened to catch his wife's eye, but he did not know *where* he had erred.

Upon the momentous occasion of Mrs. Abner, wife of the Dean of Christchurch, coming to call for the first time, he had almost turned that social victory into defeat—wrecked everything, as it were, in sight of port—by his rude behaviour. He was smoking in the garden when that lady and his wife came out into it, and he continued to smoke notwithstanding the august presence in which he found himself. It was true that in her good-nature the visitor had said : “Pray, don't throw away your cigar, Mr. Bates” (for she had caught Mrs. Bates' glance at him); but for all that, he should have done so. At all events, he should not have replied to her gracious permission :

“Nun—nun—not if I know it.” He thought her a very foolish woman to have supposed him capable of such an act of extravagance. Nor was this the worst. Like Mr. Jefferson Brick, he expectorated freely. This outrage on the proprieties was too much for his wife’s patience.

“Mr. Bates, how *dare* you, before Mrs. Abner !”

“But how was I to nun—nun—know *she was going to do it ?*”

He thought it was a question of precedence.

Mrs. Abner only laughed (the dean had married beneath him, it was rumoured, for she had a strong sense of humour), and generously overlooked this solecism in manners.

The Bateses were asked to dinner at “the Lodge”—not the porter’s lodge, where they ought to have been, but the dean’s residence—and when Mrs. Bates sent their host and hostess an invitation in return, it was

accepted. This was a triumph almost beyond expectation. If Queen Victoria was to write to *my* wife : " I'll look in to lunch on Friday," we should experience scarcely a greater degree of pleasurable surprise. In our case, it would not, perhaps, be wholly unmixed with alarm ; but to such terrors Mrs. Bates was a total stranger. That indomitable woman had a just confidence in her cook and her cellar ; and if she could only have got rid of her husband for the day, she would have been wholly without apprehension for the success of the entertainment. But Mrs. Abner had taken quite a fancy to the poor little stuttering man, so his wife did not venture to make away with him. She had dignity (as well as will) enough for two, and so long as that could be maintained, she felt that her social position was secured. The dean himself should acknowledge in his heart that he might have made choice of one more fitting to adorn his station than he had done, if he

had met Antonia Bates when she was still in her maiden pride. As matters were, his misfortune was irreparable, but it would be agreeable to cause him to regret it. There was something, however, that this magnificent woman set greater store by than even the success of her dinner-party—namely, her position as mistress of her own house; and the day before the entertainment came off, a domestic difficulty occurred, and the whole household received its *congé*. She said “Go!” and they all went with their month’s wages. The pecuniary expenditure was nothing to her, but the absence of all hands on so special an occasion was indeed deplorable. “Let justice be done though the skies fall,” is an excellent motto; but unless a cook and butler fell with the skies, or from them, what was poor Mrs. Bates to do now?

I cannot give a stronger proof of her forlorn condition than the simple statement that when the cook volunteered to remain over the next day—“as a conveniency,” as

she expressed it—that Mrs. Bates accepted her offer. We have often heard of Principle giving way to Place, but no person ever made a greater sacrifice of it than did Mrs. Bates when she allowed that cook to *keep* her place for twenty-four hours. “I would rather have cooked the dinner myself than have given in,” she exclaimed, and burst into tears ; but she felt that her guests, and the dean especially, would not have been of that opinion. Even his friends allowed that the best way of insinuating one’s self into that dignitary’s good graces was through his palate. Even as it was, there was a butler to be supplied, a matter by no means so easy at that season, when Oxford was at its gayest time, and everybody was giving dinner-parties. However, the cook knew of a young man, she said, of the “name of Chorley,” in every way desirable ; and the services of this person were accordingly engaged. Mrs. Bates, it is true, didn’t much like the look of him ; thought him nervous

and undecided in his movements ; but the cook, who was thoroughly competent to teach him his duties, promised to rehearse them with him before dinner, so that nothing should go amiss. The guests arrived in due course ; they were very few, but uncommonly choice, and being on the same social plane, got on together in the drawing-room very well.

Taking advantage of this, Mrs. Bates slipped quietly downstairs for a last look at the table before they went to dinner : I don't say at present what she found, but only observe that it was lucky she *did* find it, and in time ; then she slipped back again, pale but resolute, and presently the dinner was announced, and they trooped downstairs.

The dean said grace, his *best* grace, beginning "Bountiful Creator," for he saw that there was turtle soup, and then sat down, but only for an instant. The male guests instantly rose up again, with indications of embarrassment and pain.

"The chu-chu-chairs are as hot as the dickens!" exclaimed Mr. Bates.

His wife was quite aware of it; she had found all the hot-water plates *upon* the chairs instead of in their proper places. "Chorley" had confessed his innocence of their use, and it being cold weather (and judging, I suppose, from their general conformation) had put them where she had found them.

"Dud—dud—dud—dud," continued Mr. Bates, before she could make up her mind what to say. She was dreadfully afraid he was going to swear, and indeed so was everybody, though, to do him justice, it was only his intention to observe: "Dud—dud—don't let this happen again, Charley."

That, by-the-by, was another cause of annoyance to Mrs. Bates throughout the evening; he *would* call "Chorley" *Charley*, which seemed, and indeed *was*, a very objectionable familiarity. However, this was forgotten afterwards, swallowed up, as it were, in the catastrophe that occurred in the

meantime, and which I am about to describe. Unhappily, in consequence of the exalted rank of the company, the cause of the heat of the chairs could not with delicacy be explained, so that "a sense of mystery their spirits daunted;" one of them especially, who was a college tutor, and mathematical, was much exercised in his mind by the phenomenon. However, conversation began after a little, and went on, though with intermittent flow, until Mrs. Abner inquired of her host whether he had learned how the vice-chancellor's wife was, who was said to be threatened with dropsy.

"Oh!" said he, greatly to his consort's surprise, "she is bub—bub—better."

"I wonder how he *knows*," was Mrs. Bates' mental reflection, for her mind was as elastic as it was powerful, and had already recovered the shock of the hot chairs. She fondly hoped that no further *contre-temps* was to take place that evening. In that,

however, she reckoned very literally "without the host."

"Do you see much of the vice-chancellor's family?" inquired Mrs. Abner, returning to the charge, and good-naturedly pleased at helping poor Mr. Bates to make conversation.

"Yes, I do. I see a good dud—dud—deal of his wi—wi—wife. I often see her in her bub—bub—bub——"

Here he began to stammer very badly, and the more so because every eye was turned upon him; the dean showed quite an interest in the position or situation in which Mr. Bates had seen the vice-chancellor's lady; and the mathematical tutor whispered to his neighbour that, wherever the place was, it must have been of considerable size.

"I often see her in her bub—bub—bath," at last stammered Mr. Bates, and would have said more, but for the general

expressions of reproof that burst upon him from all sides.

"Really, Mr. Bates!" ejaculated the dean.

"I don't believe it!" exclaimed Mrs. Bates indignantly.

"What a quantity of water she must displace!" muttered the mathematical tutor.

"I see her in her bub—bub—bath-chair," cried the agonised Mr. Bates; "only, you wouldn't let me fif—fif—finish the sentence."

All this was bad enough, but fortunately so bad that there was nothing to be done but to laugh at it. Upon the whole, the dinner was going off very well, though not quite as Mrs. Bates had intended it to do. However, if her husband had made himself ridiculous, *she* at least had preserved her dignity. And Chorley had made no more mistakes, nor would now have the opportunity to make any. The napkins had not been

folded very neatly—he was a mere creature of the cook's, as it afterwards appeared, and had never before even *seen* a napkin except on a waiter's arm—but there had been nothing to complain of except those dreadful hot plates. He “waited” mechanically, as though every movement had been dictated to him, as indeed it had—but still he did wait, and without being the cause of waiting in other people.

At the end of the dinner was a little ceremony, always used in that time at Oxford at the tables which the dean honoured by his presence. He was wont to drink the health of the lady of the house, and she in her turn would drink his, and thank him for his gracious company. Chorley filled the glasses without mistake, and the dean made his pretty speech; but just as Mrs. Bates had set down her glass, and was about to open her mouth in gracious reply, an arm was put round her neck, and a

hand, enveloped in a clean napkin, dexterously but firmly passed it across her lips.

A ghastly amazement seized upon the company, and even Chorley himself perceived that he had outstepped his duties.

"Please, ma'am," explained he, simply, "the cook told me to do it, and gave me this here clean napkin for the very puppus."

At that moment a fiendish laugh rang through the hall, and the front door was slammed violently. It was the cook departing with her month's wages, and in exceedingly high spirits. She had not stopped over that dinner-party to oblige her mistress for nothing, but to accomplish a great revenge. And she *had* accomplished it. One is said in sporting phrase to have "had his *eye* wiped," when another man kills the game which has escaped his gun; but that humiliation sinks to nothing com-

pared with what had happened to poor Mrs. Bates. Her enemies said "she never was the same man" again, after that glass of wine she took with the dean.

MY FRIGHTS.

MY FRIGHTS.

THERE are some people who aver that they have never been frightened—do not even know what fear is, like the great Lord Nelson. All I can say is, that if they are telling the truth, I envy them. If I was a man, I suppose I should despise myself for being a coward ; but, being a woman, I only regret the circumstance ; and yet, I suppose no man is courageous under all circumstances. I recollect Albert Smith, in one of his Alpine lectures, describes how one of the bravest of the Swiss guides exhibited the utmost terror when he chanced to be in a boat upon Lake Constance during

a violent storm; it was a form of danger totally unfamiliar to him; if it had been avalanches, and precipices, and slipperiness, he would have thought nothing of it; but the novelty of it appalled him. I have seen instances of this myself in cases of sickness. Infection is one of the few dangers of which I am not afraid, and I find (rather, I must say, to my satisfaction) that most men are nervous about it. Again, there are brave men whose limbs tremble beneath them (and it is to be wished that there were more of them, for then the world would be less troubled with after-dinner speeches) whenever they are called upon to say a few words in public to their fellow-creatures. This, it is true, comes under the head of moral cowardice; yet I don't see why it should be held more or less contemptible than the physical failing, for it seems to me that both are due to what we women describe as "nerves." There is frequently a sort of admiration expressed for very violent, cruel,

and worthless people who make a desperate resistance to officers of justice. Men like Legree, for example, in "Uncle Tom's Cabin," who defy God and man, are thought very highly of by some people. Why is this? "The polecat is an animal very difficult to kill," says a certain philosopher of my acquaintance, "but we do not sympathise with the polecat upon that account." Why, then, should we sympathise with desperadoes because they set a fancy value upon their worthless lives, and defend them with such pertinacity? "I wonder," says Thackeray, "is it because all men are cowards at heart, that we set so enormous a value upon brute courage?" The Chinaman, plunged in vice and crime, will go to the scaffold with a cheroot in his mouth, quite unmoved by the prospect of death; the native of Japan will disembowel himself because he has received a fancied insult; the Ashantee bows before the headsman with as much *sang-froid* as he would exhibit in cutting his brother's

head off. The grave has no terrors for these people. Why? Because they are braver than civilised beings? Certainly not. It is because they have never meditated upon futurity, and are utterly without imagination. In my opinion, fear is only disgraceful when it causes its unhappy victim to desert the weak and defenceless. When General Picton ("Fighting Picton")—said to be the bravest man of his time—permitted a private slave to be tortured under his governorship (for which he was tried and found guilty at the Old Bailey), he was only a little less of a coward than an officer in India would have shown himself to be who could have left English women and children to be butchered by the mutineers, and sought his own safety by flight. It appears to me that men, who are so ready to accuse us women of being illogical, and carried away by our sentimental emotions, exhibit in this matter a great want of judgment. It is not true courage which they

admire, but carelessness of death—the attribute, as I have said, of the savage. The Irishman who sat on the branch which he was sawing off the tree was, in this point of view, a hero.

I have not written this for the purpose of underrating that quality in which I own myself deficient; but I do protest against being made out worse than I am. My sister-in-law, for example, a woman of nearly twice my altitude, and who weighs more than twice my weight, is terrified at the sight of a black-beetle, and broke through one of my best chairs (cane-bottomed) in standing upon it to avoid one; yet she calls me a coward because I can't look down a steep place without turning sick and giddy. "Why, what are you afraid of, Maria?" she giggles. "Well, I am not afraid of a black-beetle, at all events," is my reply; but I could answer her question, if I chose, at much greater length.

I am afraid of a cow, for instance: very

much afraid; all the pleasure of a country walk through a fine landscape has been often spoilt for me because of cattle in a field. If I pass through them without being tossed or gored, the recollection that I have got to come back again remains with me for the rest of the day. As for a bull, I would rather never see the country than run the chance of meeting with such a creature. A dog is thought to be a very harmless animal—a domestic animal—and the “friend of man.” He is not, however, the friend of woman—or at least of a nervous woman like me. I should be afraid to write down how often I have been prevented from calling at a friend’s house by the presence of a little poodle or terrier upon their door-step. I should as soon have thought of disturbing an adder. The Romans (a people quite remarkable for their courage) used, I am told, to print *Cave canem*, “Beware of the Dog,” upon their front doors; but such a warning would have been unnecessary in my case.

I am always fully "Beware" of it. Every farmyard in the country has a dog, and that is why I don't like farmyards. As to chains, I don't believe in them; and then there is always the consideration that if the chain *should* break, it would let loose upon the world—and me—an animal made furious by restraint, and whose imagination has been fed upon human flesh perhaps for years! Another curse of the country in my eyes are burglars. In the town there are policemen; it is true they are hard to find, but who are supposed, at least, to be within hearing of a cry for help; one has neighbours on all sides; and even in the dead of night there is always "some one about." But when the veil of evening has fallen upon a country-house, there is no hope of succour until morning.

My widowed sister-in-law (the fat one) and myself once lived in such a place a whole summer, during which I lost more flesh than if I had been all the time in a Turkish bath.

From sunset to sunrise I was in a perpetual fright, from fear of robbers ; and when the days grew shorter, and the nights longer, the place became insupportable, and I fled from it. The usual nightly programme was as follows : My sister-in-law, who occupied the same apartment as myself, would fall asleep as soon as her head touched the pillow, and leave me, as it were, alone, a prey to my terrors. She always reminded me of the irritating bedfellow described in ghost-stories, who will *not* wake while the apparition is peeping through the bed-curtains at *you*, and who, when all the dreadful things are over, cannot be persuaded that they actually occurred. Next to ghosts themselves, I dislike people of this cast, and would almost as soon have no companion at all. If the wind was up, I at once began to picture to myself a band of ruffians effecting a forcible entry into all the rooms below-stairs, and giving shouts of triumph at the ease with which they

accomplished their purpose. We could not afford to keep a man-servant, and even if we had done so, I should have always imagined him the accomplice of the burglars, or coming upstairs upon his own account with a carving-knife concealed in a scuttle of coals, as I had once read of in a book. Our house pretended to no means of resistance, and I always placed the plate-basket and its contents upon the landing of the stairs, in hopes that the gang might take what they came for, and go away without asking for my money or my life—which, indeed, would have been the same thing; for I could never have survived the question. Well, I used to hear the robbers running through the house exulting or muttering their disappointment, according as the wind blew high or low; or if there was no wind, I would listen, listen, listen, in the silence, till presently there seemed footsteps coming stealthily upstairs, and nasty creaking boots about our bed-room door; at last, the handle of the door would

be softly turned, when nature gave way, and I would shriek out frantically, "*Charlotte!*" and Charlotte would murmur "Eh; what? What's the matter?" and drop asleep again before I could tell her.

However, one fine night she got a pretty fright herself; I use the word "fine" sarcastically, for, as a matter of fact, it was pouring wet, and so dark, that when you looked out of window, you saw your own face, very white and frightened (or at least mine was), staring back into the room, and a great turn it gave you. It was a little past midnight. The drip, drip, drip of the rain was ceaseless, but for all that, as I lay awake, I could hear men's steps without, splashing in the pools it made, as the wretches walked round the house looking for the most convenient point of entry. Then I heard the back-door "go"—it burst open with a sort of muffled violence, like the sudden outpour of a waste-pipe—and then that "pit-a-pat" I knew so well, of feet

coming up the stairs. Then a pause of frightful significance.

“Charlotte!” cried I, in an agony, “they are really here. They really are, this time. Wake, wake!”

“Rubbish,” cried she. “I am wide awake, and I hear nothing.”

“They are just outside the door,” whispered I; “they are listening at the key-hole. Hark!”

“I certainly hear eaves-dropping,” was her heartless answer (she was a woman who enjoyed a joke, and her fat sides wobbled with mirth at this one); “but it’s only the rain from the roof.”

“I tell you,” said I solemnly, “there are robbers in the——”

Here something fell in the drawing-room beneath us with a hideous crash. In an instant, and before I could recover from the sort of collapse into which this shock had thrown me, Charlotte had flopped out of bed, seized the lamp, and was about to

hurry from the room. "No," said she, pausing in the doorway; "it is better that they should not see *me*, but that I should see them."

It was certainly much better, considering Charlotte's very slight attire, that the robbers should not see her; but why she should want to see the robbers was quite unintelligible to me.

"Stop!" cried I; but the fatal deed was done, and I was left in darkness.

Dreadful as it was to accompany her upon such an expedition, it seemed a thousand times worse to remain in the room alone, and, trembling in every limb, I hurried after her.

To reach the drawing-room, it was necessary to pass through the dining-room. It was pitch-dark, but I could hear her breathing hard (for her stoutness made her very short of breath) as she made her way round the table that occupied the centre of the room. Fear lent me wings, and I hurried

round the other way to meet her, and rushed into her arms just as she was feeling for the drawing-room doorway. Directly I did so, she uttered a shrill scream, and fell on the floor in a dead faint. I had forgotten that the poor dear did not know I was pursuing her, and she very naturally took me for the robbers. I suppose I fainted too, for the first thing I remember was hearing a loud purr close to my ear, which proceeded from our favourite cat, who, having knocked down the fire-irons in the next room (which was the noise we had heard), had come, as it were, to assure us that there was nothing the matter. That was the last night we spent in our country-house; and I remained in town for three whole summers afterwards. Though fresh air and "change," I was told, were indispensable, I resolved to do without them, since one might just as well die in the usual way as be frightened to death.

In the July of the fourth year, however,

I received an invitation to the seaside, which I really thought it safe to accept. My host and hostess lived at Disney Point, in Cornwall, a very lonely spot, it is true, but one in which no burglary had ever been committed within the memory of woman. "There were no bad people," wrote my friends, who were aware of my nervous peculiarities, "within a hundred miles of them." When I reached their house, I was really inclined to believe that this was the case. A more beautiful and retired spot than the little village in which they dwelt, or one inhabited by a more simple and innocent set of people, it was impossible to imagine. It was situated in a wooded ravine, through which a trout-stream ran down to the sea; and upon the hill-top, between it and the ocean, were the most picturesque church and churchyard I, or anybody's eye, ever beheld. From the house we could only hear the distant whisper of the waves, like the murmuring hum of bees, but they were giant

waves, and the rocks were torn and split with their fury into weird and horrid shapes. It was the grandest sea-coast I had yet visited, and all day long I sat beside it with my sketch-book, or merely watching the white wrath of the breakers, and listening to the thunder in the caverns at my feet. I was not at all afraid of the sea—when I was upon the land. Indeed, I am not alarmed at anything (notwithstanding what some people say to the contrary), unless there is a reasonable cause for fear. For instance, I am not afraid—at least, I *was* not, until the terrible catastrophe occurred which I am about to relate—of supernatural apparitions. When I announced my intention, one evening, of going up the hill to sketch the churchyard by moonlight, there arose quite a rude titter in the drawing-room. “Surely not alone, Mary Anne? Let one of the girls go with you,” said my hostess.

“What is there to be afraid of in a churchyard? No, I thank you,” replied I

proudly. "The miserable superstitions of the country do not affect *me*, I do assure you."

"But it is so lonely up there, my dear!"

"What of that? Solitude and stillness are the fit accompaniments of such a solemn scene. I had much rather go there by myself."

I was resolved to exhibit my independence, as well as to do away with any false impressions my excellent hostess might have received from Charlotte or others with respect to my courage; but at the same time she need not have reminded me that it was "so lonely up there." I did not expect to find Disney churchyard the centre of fashion, or the scene of an excursion pic-nic at ten o'clock at night, of course: her remark was officious and unnecessary, and at the same time it made my blood run cold. However, when the moon rose, so did I, and, sketch-book in hand, toiled up to the old church, which was also, from

its prominent position, a landmark used by sailors, which taught them to avoid the rocks at Disney Point. Whatever might be the matter, there was always a wind up there, and even in that still summer night it was wandering about the grasses of the graves, and whispering into the ears of the stone gargoyles of the church, which seemed to grin in malice at its news of storm and wreck to come.

I seated myself on my camp-stool, just in front of the porch, and began what I intended to be a hasty sketch, just a few strokes, to be filled in at my leisure, for I felt the situation to be "uncanny," and already wished myself at home. My fingers shook a little, certainly not with cold, and, though the architecture was said to be a "fine specimen of the perpendicular," it did not appear so in my sketch-book.

Suddenly I heard a subdued sob; the utterance, as it seemed to me, of some poor creature of my own sex in distress. It came

from an obscure corner of the churchyard, where the graves were not so well cared for and tended as the others were—a spot, I had been told, where those were laid whom the pitiless sea had drowned. When a ship was cast upon the rocks yonder, it was rare even for one of its crew to reach that rock-bound shore alive; and after a great storm, whole ships' companies were sometimes buried at once in the churchyard of Disney Head.

I listened with beating heart, and the sound was repeated; and this time I felt sure it was as I had supposed. Doubtless, some woman had come to weep in secret over the grave of her sailor son or husband; there was no need to be frightened in such a case. It might be that I should be able to give her comfort. I rose, and moving towards the wreck-corner (as it was called), could dimly make out a woman's figure kneeling at the head of a grave. In the presence of so great a sorrow, I seemed to

lose all selfish fear, and ventured softly to address her. She did not reply, nor even so much as turn her head, though I felt certain she must have heard me; and since she was a woman, and did not speak, I felt there must be something very wrong with her. As I drew nearer, I beheld a spectacle that overwhelmed me with pity. The unhappy creature before me was naked to the waist, and with her arms straight down by her side, was gazing on the grave beneath her with a look of indescribable despair. She shed no tear, but her eyes wore a look of hopeless woe and yearning beyond all ordinary sorrow.

“You are killing yourself, my poor woman,” reasoned I, “to kneel there in such a plight. The dead you mourn can ask no such sacrifice as this that you should join them.”

But again she answered nothing; and then, to my horror, I observed that she had dug another grave, at the head of that

she was watching, and was already buried in it up to her waist! Was she then bent upon committing suicide, or was she herself an inhabitant of the tomb, like those around her, and were the graves indeed giving up their dead at that witching hour of night, as I had read of, but had not believed?

In an agony of terror, such as even I had never before experienced, I flung down my sketch-book, and rushed from the church-yard and down the hill.

"What is the matter, Mary Anne?" cried my amazed hostess, who was sitting up for me with her husband in the parlour, as I tore into the room shrieking for help.

"Matter!" cried I. "There is a poor young woman, with nothing upon her, half-buried alive in the wreck-corner of the church-yard. She has already lost her sight and hearing, for she took no notice of me at all."

"Impossible!" cried my hostess.

"But I've *seen* her," shrieked I. "Not a moment is to be lost."

“Ah, bless you! we’ve seen her too,” said my host, laughing. “It’s the figure-head of the *Bella*. When the ship came ashore, we stuck it up at the captain’s grave, by way of headstone—poor fellow! She has not got much on her, it’s true; but I don’t think she’ll hurt.”







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